

Plant of the Month - December

by Allan Carr

Macaranga tanarius

Pronunciation: mak-a-RAN-ga tan-AR-ee-us

macaranga
EUPHORBIACEAE

Derivation: *Macaranga*, the Malagasy name from Madagascar where the type species, *Macaranga mauritiana* (now listed as endangered in the wild) was named in 1806. *tanarius*, possibly a reference to the Amboinese use of the bark for tanning fishing nets.



Leaf with nine reddish veins



Habit on rainforest edge



Female flowers

Macaranga is a large genus of around 300 species in tropical areas worldwide with 8 of these in Australia.

Description: *M. tanarius* is the most widespread species of the genus distributed in Australia from north-eastern Qld to north-eastern NSW as well as Papua New Guinea and South-east Asia. It occurs naturally in rainforest but is most prominent as a pioneer species in cleared or disturbed areas. This shrub or small tree grows to 6 m with grey-brown bark on a trunk reaching 30 cm diameter and bluish-grey branchlets with many leaf scars. It was first collected by Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander at Endeavour River in 1770 on the first voyage of Captain James Cook.

Leaves are *peltate, alternate, rounded to 250 mm across and drawn out to a point, bright shiny green above and paler below with 9 radiating prominent veins, often reddish. Leaves stand out on 250 mm stalks.

Flowers to 12 mm across on 120 mm *panicles in leaf axils are pale yellow with fringed *bracts from September to February. Male and female flowers are borne on separate plants (dioecious).

Fruits are 3-lobed, spherical, softly spiny capsules to 15 mm diameter with 3 round, glossy black seeds.

*peltate = with the stalk attached to the lower surface away from the margin

*panicle = a much-branched flower spike

*bract = leaf-like part at flower base

Leaves, flowers, fruit and seeds

