

Plant of the Month

August
2023

Common Name: Spitting Tree

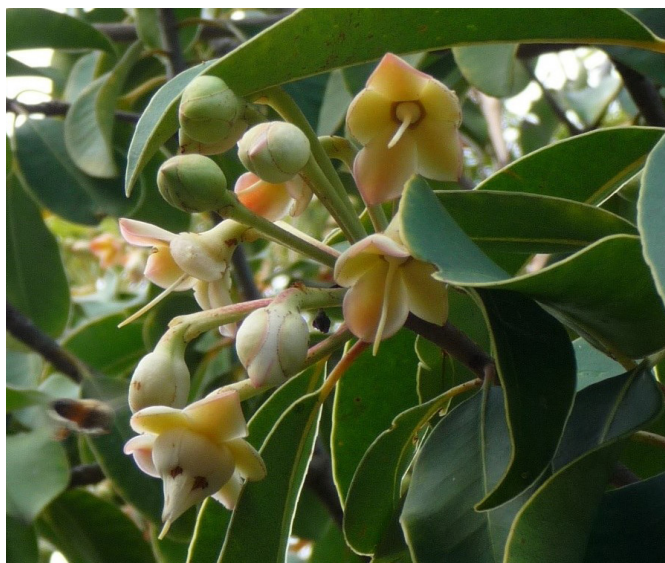
Scientific Name: *Anneslea fragrans*
Wall.

Family: Pentaphylacaceae

Etymology

Genus: *Anneslea* – named for George Annesley (1770–1844), 2nd Earl of Mountnorris.

Species: *fragrans* - fragrant flowers



Distribution

Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

Native Habitat

Forests or thickets on mountain slopes or valleys from 300–2700 m.

Description

An evergreen shrub or tree, 3–15 m tall. Current years branchlets are reddish brown aging to greyish brown. Leaf size and shape is variable leading to the naming of a number of subspecies. They are leathery and pale or glaucous green.

Flowers

Pale yellow flowers occur in the leaf axiles and there are more than 10 per inflorescence known botanically as a corymb. Petals in young flowers are tightly clasped together when they first emerge. Flowers are fragrant and attract insect pollinators.

Fruit

Fruit globose to ellipsoid 2–3.5 cm in diameter. Seeds have a fleshy red outer layer.

Location in Garden

Oriental Garden

Information

The common name of this tree provides a clue to how this attractive flower lures insects and ensures that its pollen is transferred from one flower to another via an inbuilt trigger mechanism.

The young flower is very elegant, with petals clasped together, forming a structure our former Director, Tim Entwisle, described as resembling a Russian church spire.

The swollen base of this spire like flower has slits in it to allow the flowers perfume to escape. Bees and other insects are attracted to the smell but if they knock the protruding floral parts in any way, a blob of pollen fires out of the top of the flower.

The shocked and now pollen-coated bee moves to a new bloom. This time if it visits an older flower, full open and receptive, the pollen being carried by the bee will be deposited on the style or female part of the flower and pollination can place. Fruit and seed can now be produced.