

**IDENTIFICATION OF LOCAL WATTLES comments by Linda Wright, Garibaldi Landcare Group, 2016**

There are, apparently, 12 local species of wattles (Acacia) that are actually indigenous to our area. Identification can be a bit of a pain, because there are also lots of other wattles that are commonly grown and have naturalised in the area. What I've tried to do here is to show the local ones and 2 of the most commonly grown introduced ones, and good luck to us all to figure out the rest!

In the Garibaldi area, there is one ground cover, growing very flat: Snake Wattle or Thin-leaf Wattle, botanically called *Acacia aculeatissima*. It is commonly found in clay soil under or near open dry eucalyptus bushland in my experience. Here's what it looks like:



I have one snake wattle sticking up about 30 cm and covering at least a square meter, right out in the sun on the side of our velodrome dam, looking very healthy. Not usually where I find them – usually under the eucs.



The rest of the wattles are shrubs or trees. They can be divided into two types, ones with “bipinnate leaves” like this:



Among our local indigenous wattles, there are 2 with leaves like this: Black Wattle (*A. mearnsii*) and Silver wattle (*A. dealbata*). Also commonly grown in the area are Cootamundra Wattle (*A. baileyana*).

Black wattles tend to be not much more than about 10 metres tall, in my experience, around this area; various sources say they grow from about 6 m to 15 m). They are often sparsely flowering, especially in drier summers. Their flowers are a pale yellow (as opposed to their cousins the Silver Wattle which have quite bright yellow flowers). Flowering time is variable, generally Dec. – Jan.

Here are some pics of Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*):





Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*)



- Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*)
- The characteristics of Black Wattles locally include:
  - dark branches tending to dark brown or black (although new branches can be green) – unlike silver wattles which are green or light coloured in the main;
  - leaves green top and bottom (unlike the silver wattle which has silvery underside leaves);
  - prone to borer attack which means they often bleed sap and die.

Here are some pics of Silver Wattle (*Acacia dealbata*):



An extra characteristic of Silver Wattle is its strong tendency to sucker from the base of the tree, to form an extensive copse of what looks like a lot of trees but is actually just the one tree. An annoying habit in areas where you don't want it to spread and don't want to have to keep it in check! But great where you do want it to spread, of course.

They bloom in summer, mainly Jan – Feb. Height: trees can be up to 30 m, but usually they are from 5 to 15 metres, depending on how good the soil is (and how old they are, of course).

And now for the introduced Cootamundra Wattle, which blooms in July when most other plants are “asleep”. It’s a declared noxious weed in parts of Victoria because the birds (e.g. bronzewings) love its seed and spread it everywhere, and inevitably some will sprout! But where it can be kept at bay, it is a gorgeous taller wattle tree (10 m and spreading habit). There are even bronzed or purple leaved varieties about. Here’s what it looks like in July:





Characteristic of Cootamundra wattle is the pinwheel pattern of the leaves around the leaf stems. It is unlike any other wattle I've seen in that regard.

Now for the 10 varieties of indigenous wattle shrubs-to-small-trees that don't have bipinnate leaves, but rather "false leaves" or phyllodes (they say these are flattened stems rather than true leaves).

Firstly, the prickly ones: Prickly Moses (*A. verticillata*) and Hedge Wattle or Kangaroo Thorn (*A. paradoxa*).

These both grow into shrubs from 1 to 3m, maybe 4 m but unusual.

First, Prickly Moses, with its very fine phyllodes that are sharp on the ends:



They bloom Aug – Sept.





Prickly Moses (*Acacia verticillata*)

And now for the wattles with thorns as well as phyllodes: Hedge Wattle (*Acacia paradoxa*):



These guys bloom any time from July to October, but generally late October around here.



They can look rather weedy and scraggly. And very definitely a place for little birds to hide, as they repel predators! Pricks that they are! (Excuse me....)

Then there is the very common long-lived Blackwood tree with its late spring pale flowers (Sep. – Nov.) and tall, spreading habit, with dark dense foliage, and often a scatter of young ones around any mature trees. They grow well on dry clay and relatively damp sand (so long as they don't stand in water) and anything in between. Trees usually up to 10 m, sturdy with dark trunks.

Here are some pics of Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*):



Seeds are often on the tree while the next year's flowers are blooming.

Bright orange "awn" around seed.



This is a small Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*) and doesn't yet have a collection of seedlings around it.



Okay, you get the idea about Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*).

Now for a tree that looks quite similar to the Blackwood, but is called a Lightwood, *Acacia implexa*.



Lightwood (*A. implexa*) flowers appear in summer.



Not shown here, but they apparently, like Silver Wattles, have a strongly suckering habit, and so can hold dam and river banks together well. I'm not familiar with them, as I don't think they are growing around Garibaldi....



Lightwood (*A. implexa*) leaves (uh, phyllodes) are longer than Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*) "leaves". And they are a paler green.





Lightwood (*A. implexa*) seedpods are not as curly as Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*) seedpods. Also, it doesn't appear, from the photo at least, that they have that bright orange "awn" thing around the seeds that the blackwood has.

Now for a couple of local wattles that are hard for us plebs to tell apart: Red Stemmed Wattle or Myrtle Wattle (*Acacia myrtifolia*) and Wirilda or Swamp Wattle (*Acacia provincialis*). Both can be red-stemmed! But Myrtle Wattle is MORE red-stemmed, and the phyllodes are shorter and fatter than Wirilda, which tend to have long, skinny phyllodes, but not necessarily. Wirilda, as its other name of Swamp Wattle indicates, likes wet areas; it can grow a lot taller (6 to 10 metres) than the Myrtle Wattle, which is usually no taller than 3 metres, and can be a lot shorter.

When in flower, Wirilda has yellow to pale yellow flowers in long strings (racemes). They can flower throughout the year, so they say. The Myrtle Wattle apparently flowers winter and spring, and its flowers are creamy to pale yellow.

The seedpods are the give-away: Myrtle Wattle (*A. myrtifolia*) pods are bumpy and indented and long and skinny. Wirilda (*A. provincialis*) pods are flat and smooth and wide and long.

Anyway, have a look at the photos (which I've put side-by-side) and see if you can tell the differences.



Wirilda (*Acacia provincialis*)



Myrtle Wattle (*Acacia myrtifolia*)

In these photos, the Wirilda has the redder stem, but the Myrtle Wattle does have short, wide phyllodes.

Here are the seedpods, which are distinctive when you can find them on the plants:



Wirilda (*Acacia provincialis*)



Myrtle Wattle (*Acacia myrtifolia*) – in this photo, the seedpods are unripe, but very differently shaped to the Wirilda ones.



Wirilda (*Acacia provincialis*)

See next page for Myrtle Wattle photo showing a complete shrub.

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Myrtle Wattle (*Acacia myrtifolia*)



Have you guessed correctly as to which one this is? (See next page.)

And the one below?



Okay – top one is not red-stemmed but the photographer (Lemis) claims it to be a Myrtle Wattle (*Acacia myrtifolia*)

The lower photo, from the group Actaplanarum, is said to be a Wirilda (*Acacia provincialis*).

To summarise:

I think the seedpods are the give-away, though neither photo above shows those.

And the phyllodes of the Myrtle Wattle are much shorter and fatter in general, by comparison with the Wirilda, which have long linear phyllodes (usually).

And the stems of the Myrtle Wattle are – well, usually – very red, as compared with the Wirilda stems.

And if you see a 6 m tall is-it-a-Wirilda-or-is-it-a-Myrtle-Wattle, then it's a Wirilda, since the Wirildas can grow a lot taller than the Myrtle Wattles, so they say.

Onwards, to the last group of local wattles with phyllodes: Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), Hop Wattle (*Acacia stricta*) and Varnish Wattle (*Acacia verniciflua*).

Golden Wattles (*A. pycnantha*) are gorgeous trees (grow tall and slender when mature) except when they are damaged by frost, which they will be if not growing in amongst a stand of eucs. They're quite distinctive. Here are some pics.





Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*)



Hop Wattle (*Acacia stricta*) is a shrub with oval, symmetrical phyllodes and brown stems, and yellow flowers, and very distinctive seedpods – to distinguish it from a Myrtle Wattle or a Wirilda.

Sometimes it's called a Straight Wattle or Straight-leaf Wattle; you can see why.

Here are some identifying pics.



These phyllodes are shorter than in most pics. Who knows, maybe it's not really a Hop Wattle????





Hop Wattle (*Acacia stricta*)

Finally in this presentation is the Varnish Wattle, or *Acacia verniciflua*. I've never seen one to identify it locally, so all I can do is give you pics and a description based on what I read.

According to the Australian National Botanic Gardens, "Description: Variable shrub to 4 m, generally erect and sparsely branched. Young growth shiny, from which is derived the common name." It varies, apparently, from erect to spreading, and from 1 to 8 metres tall.

So, some pics:



plant tags.

This is the photo composite used on our



Nice close-up of Varnish Wattle (*A. verniciflua*) by Carol Hall of the Field Nats. Club of Ballarat.



Varnish Wattle (*A. verniciflua*)

with Regents Honeyeater. Mainly included for the bird!



More Varnish Wattle pics (*Acacia verniciflua*)





This is the best I can do for the Varnish Wattle, *Acacia verniciflua*.

One of the commonly grown wattles that is Victorian native but not local is the Ovens Wattle, *Acacia pravissima*. It grows very well on the clay / quartz soils in our area, looks attractive, and yet doesn't seem to spread by seed or suckering. It is quite distinctive because of its curvy triangular-shaped phyllodes. It grows around here to about 4 to 6 metres and flowers in September. Here are some pictures:





(New Zealand grown! But a Victorian native.)



I included this pic because it was done by a group in my home town of Sequim in Washington State in the US of A!

Photo references:

Acacia aculeatissima	Photo 1: <a href="http://www.plantmark.com.au">www.plantmark.com.au</a> Photo 2: <a href="https://natureshare.org.au/observations?species=Acacia+aculeatissima">https://natureshare.org.au/observations?species=Acacia+aculeatissima</a>
Acacia baileyana	Photo 1: Gardeningwithangus Photo 2: photographer unidentified
Acacia dealbata	Photo 1: Silberakazie Wikimedia Commons Photo 2: AF Wikimedia
Acacia implexa	Photo 1: <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AAcacia_implexa_flowers_1.jpg">https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AAcacia_implexa_flowers_1.jpg</a> Photo 2: James Booth <a href="https://natureshare.org.au">https://natureshare.org.au</a> Photo 3: Acacia implexa leaves: Wikimedia Commons Photo 4: Acacia_implexa_Lightwood_900_6 seeds <a href="http://elstercreek.org.au">elstercreek.org.au</a>
Acacia melanoxylon	Photo 1: <a href="http://www.fobif.org.au/page/10/">http://www.fobif.org.au/page/10/</a> Photo 2: acacia_melanoxylon60 seeds datuopinion Photo 3: photographer unidentified Photo 4: baumportal.de Photo 5: acacia-melanoxylon-2small16-91 invasoras
Acacia myrtifolia	Photo 1: <a href="http://www.lemis.com/grog/Albums/garden/Flowers-20110925.php?dirdate=20110925&amp;imagesizes=14#Photo-1">http://www.lemis.com/grog/Albums/garden/Flowers-20110925.php?dirdate=20110925&amp;imagesizes=14#Photo-1</a> Photo 2: <a href="http://davesgarden.com/members/kennedyh">http://davesgarden.com/members/kennedyh</a> Photo 3: Acacia_myrtifolia_070 from <a href="http://friendsoflanecovenantlpark">friendsoflanecovenantlpark</a>
Acacia paradoxa	Photo 1: by RuthP on Flickr Photo 2: by Carol Hall, Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Photo 3: <a href="http://canberranaturemap">canberranaturemap</a>
Acacia pravissima	Photo 1: <a href="http://davesgarden.com/members/pete2256">http://davesgarden.com/members/pete2256</a> Photo 2: Phil Bendie (New Zealand) Photo 3: Acacia-pravissima-(310x410) from <a href="http://sequimrareplants">sequimrareplants</a>
Acacia provincialis	Photo 1: by Carol Hall, Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Photo 2: Acacia retinodes-vagens Photo 3: actaplantarum Photo 4: actaplantarum
Acacia pycnantha	Photo 1: <a href="https://waltzingmorethanmatildadotcom1.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/floral-emblem-golden-wattle.jpg">https://waltzingmorethanmatildadotcom1.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/floral-emblem-golden-wattle.jpg</a> Photo 2: Acacia pycnantha-arvore-em-flor Photo 3: Acacia-Pycnantha-10 seedpods <a href="http://gardensonline">gardensonline</a>
Acacia stricta	Photo 1: <a href="http://www.gregsindigenousslscapes.com.au/Category13.php">http://www.gregsindigenousslscapes.com.au/Category13.php</a> Photo 2: South Australian Seed Conservation Centre Photo 3: <a href="http://friendsofknocklofty">friendsofknocklofty</a>
Acacia verniciflua	Photo 1: Rexness from Melbourne; <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=40889727">https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=40889727</a> Photo 2: by Carol Hall, Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Photo 3: GlenJ Photo 4: ANBG Photos 5 & 6: NSW govt. publication (from pdf file)
Acacia verticillata	Photo 1: Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Photo 2: <a href="http://gregsindigenousslscapes.com.au">http://gregsindigenousslscapes.com.au</a> Photo 3: Diversity Native Seeds / Hunter Valley Native Seeds