

Drooping Sheoak

Allocasuarina verticillata

NAMING: *Allo* means other or different referring to this plants differences to other Casuarina genus. *Casuar* is Malayan for Cassowary for the feather-like leaves, *verticillata* is Latin referring to the whorled leaves on the stems. Sheoak is the common name for Allocasuarinas due to the woods similarity to European Oak.

DISTRIBUTION: *Allocasuarina verticillata* is native to south-eastern Australia.

HABITAT: They grow from coastal headlands and plains to rocky outcrops on inland ranges.

DESCRIPTION: The Drooping Sheoak is a medium sized bushy, evergreen tree that has a rounded head. When young they can look rather sparse and scraggly but this changes with age. Bark is dark grey, hard and fissured. The trees are long-lived (up to 100 years). They have large root nodules with micro-organisms that "fix" nitrogen into the soil.



Characteristically, the long, weeping, segmented branchlets function as **leaves**. The leaves are reduced to minute scales encircling the branchlet joints. Fallen branchlets can form a dense cover, preventing the development of undergrowth (allelopathy), making sheoak woods remarkably quiet.

Sheoaks are either male or female. Male plants have long slender, yellowish-brown **flowers**. They are wind pollinators, producing clouds of pollen in

late autumn and winter. Female trees produce small red and cream fluffy flowers on their branches in winter. These develop into brown oval **seed cones**, (actually woody fruit). They cones are covered in points that, when mature, split lengthways to release dark-brown, winged seeds.



TRADITIONAL USE: The foliage is acidic and was traditionally chewed to produce saliva and so reduce the effects of thirst. The young cones were chewed (oak apples), roasted or used to flavor water. The wood is very hard making it ideal for clubs spears, boomerangs, shields, and digging sticks.

ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE: It is the primary food source for the endangered Glossy Black Cockatoo.

INTERESTING FACTS:

Interestingly, when the wind blows through their leaves you hear the sound of the ocean (the **shee** in sheoak).