

Silver Banksia

Banksia marginata

NAMING: After botanist Joseph Banks. *Marginatus* is Latin for bordered and refers to leaf margins.

DISTRIBUTION: *Banksia marginata*, otherwise known as Silver Banksia, is found naturally across Australia in coastal areas, heathlands, and open forests.

HABITAT: It favours a sunny or partly shady position and may become spindly if grown in the shade. It can tolerate a variety of soil types including sandy soils, loams and clay. The tree prefers well-drained soil but can tolerate moist and even waterlogged sites. It is drought resistant and will do well in exposed windy locations.

DESCRIPTION: Silver Banksia are hardy, fairly fast growing and long-lived. The Silver Banksia is the most variable species of the banksias as it can grow as a shrub or tree 1-12 metres tall. Typically, it is a medium sized shrub about 2 metres high and 2 metres wide. Some forms have a lignotuber, which is a woody swelling at the base of the stem that can regenerate the tree after fire.

The **bark** is pale grey and initially smooth but splits into a fine, tile-like pattern as it ages. New branches are pale or pinkish brown and hairy at first but lose their hairs as they mature.

Leaves are somewhat stiff with a prominent midrib covered in brownish hairs. They are up to 60mm long and 3 - 13mm wide with small serrations on the leaf edges and tips. The upper surface of the leaves is dark green and the underneath is white and hairy. In the wind, the leaves appear silvery, giving rise to the common name.

The complex **flowers** grow as cylindrical spikes which are 50 to 100mm long, 40 to 60mm wide.



They grow from February to July from nodes on branchlets that are at least three years old but can occur throughout the year. These pale-yellow flower spikes each have a central woody axis with up to 1000 individual flowers growing sideways out of the central axis. Over time the flower spikes fade from yellow to brown and then grey, and the old flowers generally persist on the cone. The woody fruits (follicles) develop in the six months after flowering, with up to 150 growing on the central flower spike. These fruits remain sealed until burnt when they can open to release their 1-2 seeds. The seeds are egg to wedge shaped with a dark-brown membranous "wings". They are spread in the wind.



TRADITIONAL USE: Traditionally, the flowers were soaked to make a sweet drink while the dried cones made various implements.

ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE: The flowers produce copious amounts of nectar that is important for sustaining birds, insects and other wildlife.