

# Plant of the Month

May  
2024

**Common Name:** Wollemi Pine

**Scientific Name:** *Wollemia nobilis*

W.G.Jones, K.D.Hill & J.M.Allen

**Family:** Araucariaceae

**Genus:** *Wollemia* – the name of the national park where trees were found. Word from the Dharug language meaning - “look around you, keep your eyes open, and watch out”.

**Species epithet:** *nobilis* – from the noble bearing of the tree and also referencing David Noble who discovered the trees.



## Distribution

Wollemi Pines grow in deep, remote gorges in the Wollemi National Park, north west of Sydney, part of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

## Native Habitat

On ledges in sandstone canyons with dry sclerophyll woodland on the ridges and warm temperate rainforest within the gorges or canyons.

## Description

Large, evergreen, multi-trunked, coniferous tree. The tallest tree in the wild measures 38.5 metres and on average trees have between 4 and 5 stems. Bark is covered in dark nodules or tubercles that have been likened to “coco pops”.

## Reproduction

The Wollemi Pine is a conifer and reproduces by cone structures. Male and female cones occur on the same tree (monoecious). Male cones (pictured above) produce pollen in late spring which is released and carried by wind. Female cones are round (pictured left) and if pollinated produce winged seeds, which are released and spread by wind. Seeds can take 18 months to mature in the cone.

## Location in Garden

Middle Garden Bed 18a (planted 1998) & in the Calyx.

## Information

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the discovery of the Wollemi Pine by National Parks ranger David Noble, who saw them while canyoning in remote areas of the Wollemi National Park. Fewer than 100 trees exist in the wild and less than 50 of those are mature adult trees. They belong to the Araucariaceae family which reached maximum diversity between 200 and 65 million years ago. Their nearest relatives are the Kauri Pines (*Agathis*) and Norfolk Island, Hoop and Bunya Pines (*Araucaria*). Australia is the only country where all 3 genera grow in the wild.

Recent research using advanced genomic sequencing has detected some genetic variation in surviving trees. “Meta collections” of cultivated trees representing this genetic diversity are being created and shared with botanic institutions around the world to create “ex-situ” conservation collections. Translocation populations have also been created in natural areas similar to the wild habitats of the Wollemi Pine. Research continues to investigate ways of combatting the fungal pathogen *Phytophthora cinnamoni*. These and other research projects are vital to ensure that this critically endangered and unique tree survives for future generations to admire.

