

Plant of the Month



July
2024

Name: *Camellia petelotii* var. *petelotii* (Merr.) Sealy

Synonym: *Camellia nitidissima*

Common Name: Golden Camellia

Family: Theaceae

Genus: For Moravian Jesuit botanist George Joseph Kamel (1661 - 1706)

Species epithet: For French botanist Alfred Pételot (1885-1940).

Distribution

Native of Guangxi Province in southern China and in northern Vietnam.

Native Habitat

Moist subtropical forests below 500 m altitude. Prefers shade as it grows in the forest understorey.

Description

Shrub up to 5 m tall with dark green, leathery leaves that are glossy above and finely serrated on the margin. New growth is reddish purple.

Flowers and Fruit

Flowers are cup-shaped (to 5 cm diameter), waxy and held within the foliage. Colour varies between butter yellow and golden, with many golden stamens and elongated yellow styles. Flowering in winter to spring is followed by thick-walled, smooth, green fruits that look like a small apple.

Location in Garden

Camellia Garden (bed 4b) near Rathborne Lodge . Use our new Garden Explorer plant finder at: <https://rbgsydney.gardenexplorer.org/>

Information

Camellia petelotii var. *petelotii* (syn. *nitidissima*) is a member of the tea family, Theaceae, that includes *Camellia sinensis*, the species from which black and green tea is produced. In 2017, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Global Trees Campaign (GTC) published a report on the conservation status of Theaceae. They assessed 254 species and concluded that 85 species were threatened with extinction. This species is considered vulnerable, as wild populations are threatened by over collection and habitat loss.

This is one of more than 30 yellow-flowered *Camellia* species. It was originally described in 1949 but was rediscovered in China close to the border with Vietnam in the 1960s. It was brought into cultivation in the 1970s, causing great excitement amongst *Camellia* growers and breeders in western countries.

Leaves and flowers are used in China to make tea. It is also used in traditional medicine for treating a wide range of ailments. Scientific studies in recent years have been undertaken on plant extracts to investigate their antioxidant and anti-cancer activity, and cytotoxicity.

