

April 2026

Plant of the month

Firewood Banksia



Common Name: Firewood, Portwine or Strawberry Banksia

Scientific Name: *Banksia menziesii*

Family: Proteaceae

Genus: After Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), patron of natural sciences; sailed with Captain Cook 1768–71 collecting largest private herbarium in Europe, over 30,000 species.

Species epithet: After surgeon-naturalist, Archibald Menzies and his early expedition to Albany, West Australia in 1791.



About

This species was first collected in 1827 by Charles Fraser during Captain James Stirling's exploration of the Swan River. The common name, Firewood Banksia, arose from its quick-burning properties.

The Noongar name is Bulgalla. Whereas the Beeloo Whadjuk Noongar people of the Perth region know it as the Mungyt. An infusion of the flowers was used traditionally to relieve coughs and colds and as a refreshing drink.

The flowering of *Banksia menziesii* heralds autumn in the West Australian bush. The flowers attract nectar eating birds, particularly the Brown, New Holland and White-cheeked honeyeaters, Western Spinebills, various parrots and wattlebirds. It also provides an important food source, both flowers and seeds, for the threatened short-billed black cockatoo, Carnaby's Cockatoo. The huge nectar rich flowers attract a range of ants, bees and beetles and the tiny, threatened Honey Possum relies heavily on this plant in the wild.

West Australian botanical illustrator, Phillippa Nikulinsky, produced a stunning book exploring this species and its life cycle. *Banksia menziesii* is widely used in the cut flower industry both in Australia and overseas.

This plant will regenerate from a lignotuber after fire. Banksias often require fire to release seeds for germination. *Banksia menziesii* grows in well-drained soil and can be difficult to cultivate on the east coast where summers are humid, as it is susceptible to dieback caused by the soil-borne water mould, *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.



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Native Habitat

Grows in deep sandy soils of the Perth Coastal Plain and north of Perth to Geraldton in scrubland or low woodland.

Distribution

Native to West Australia and grows from the North Perth region to the Murchison River.

Description

A small tree or low spreading shrub, in which several stems arise from the woody base known as the lignotuber. The serrated leaves are dull green, new growth a paler grey green.

Flowers

Flower spikes appear at the end of branches in autumn/winter, peaking in June/July. Colours range from iconic red to pink, yellow and bronze. They have a distinctive 'acorn' appearance, with long grey green leaves with toothed margins. Flowers open at the base first, the top is last to open.

Fruit

Once pollinated and fertilised, the flower dies away leaving only a few follicles to grow, swell and release seed. Plant is dependent on fire to open the woody follicles, each one producing one or two viable wedge-shaped (cuneate) seeds, on either side of a woody separator.

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