

September 2026

Plant of the month

Rough-shelled Macadamia



Common Name: Rough-shelled Macadamia
Scientific Name: *Macadamia tetraphylla*
L.A.S Johnson
Family: Proteaceae
Genus: after John Macadam, 19th century Victorian chemist
Species epithet: *tetra* - four, *phylla* - leaf, refers to the four-whorled leaves



Macadamia is a genus of four species that grow only in eastern Australia, and all species are listed as vulnerable or endangered. Only two species, *Macadamia integrifolia* and *Macadamia tetraphylla* produce oil rich, delicious and nutritious edible seeds.

The first commercial planting of Macadamias for edible nut production was in northern NSW in 1888. Due to insect pests and rats this initial commercial attempt failed but trees were planted on private property for domestic consumption. Plants sent to Hawaii in 1882 became the foundation of the commercial Macadamia industry in the early 20th century. Australia is now the largest producer of Macadamia nuts in the world, with *M.integrifolia* forms and hybrids of *M.integrifolia* and *M.tetraphylla*, being the most commonly grown varieties.

M. tetraphylla is threatened in the wild by habitat loss, fragmentation of small isolated populations, invasive weeds, fire, climate change and genetic pollution by hybridising with planted varieties. At our Australian Plantbank, research is underway to unlock the secret of storing Macadamia seed for the future. Like many rainforest seeds, Macadamia seed doesn't respond to traditional seed storage methods.



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Distribution

From the Richmond river in north east NSW to Mt Cotton in south east Queensland, from 30m to 800m altitude.

Habitat

A mid-layer tree in rainforests and moist areas of open forests often along stream banks. Trees also occur in areas previously cleared for agriculture.

Description

Evergreen tree with a broad canopy, growing 8 – 15m in height and 6 – 8m wide. Juvenile leaves pink, purplish or red, whilst mature leaves are green and coarsely toothed usually in whirls of 4.

Flowers & Fruit

Flowers are produced in pairs on a long racemes. Individual flowers are small, fragrant, pink to purple and pollinated by bees, most effectively by the native bee, *Tetragonula carbonaria*. Fruit is a woody follicle with a pointy apex. Within the hard rough shell are one or two edible seeds.

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