photo: J. Tann - www.flickr.com

Daviesia latifolia

***Daviesia latifolia* is a multi-stemmed, medium to large shrub to about 2 m high [9, 14]. Like some other species (e.g. *Daviesia mimosoides*), the leaves are not true leaves but flattened stems (phyllodes), similar to many acacias [14].**

***Daviesia* is named after the botanist Hugh Davies (1739 – 1821). *Latifolia,* from Latin, means latus, broad, and folium, leaf, refers to broad "leaves" [5]. The common name is Broad-leaved Bitter-pea [9].**

Population map:

www.ala.org.au/explore/species-maps/

Natural Populations

Daviesia latifolia is found in the eastern states, Qld, NSW, Vic and Tas [8]. It is widespread in open forests, dry sclerophyll communities and woodlands, to 1800 m of altitude [5, 8]. It prefers semi-shade but will tolerate full sun [12, 13]. It is found on most soils [12, 13] but does not tolerate poor drainage [12].

Twelve natural hybrids are briefly described in the *Latifolia* group [6].

Flowering and Seeds

D. latifolia produces flowers from spring to early summer, followed by elongated, flattened seed pods containing 1-2 seeds [14]. In Tasmania, this species flowers from August to November, seed is collected in November and sowing should occur from January to April or August to October [13]. In NSW, it flowers from September to December, and seeds are available from early December to late January [12].

The pods turn brown and become brittle when ripe, and the seed turns from green to black [1, 5, 12, 13]. Seed drops very soon after maturity so pods must be collected before they split, usually 4-6 weeks after flowering [2].

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Monitor fruits closely, bag maturing fruits or place groundsheets under plants to catch seed (although ants also harvest the seed). Alternatively, the pods can be harvested close to maturity (when they turn light-brown and brittle, and rattle when shaken) and fully dried in a warm area [1]. It may be difficult to obtain seed in useful quantities [12].

To source seeds or plants:

www.grassywoodlands.org.au

Cultivation and Uses

Pods may need to be crushed to extract seed [13]. Propagation is easy after seed treatment to break the physical dormancy provided by the impervious seed coat [14]. Soak in near-boiling water for about 30 seconds, before cooling rapidly under flowing cold water [3, 12]. Alternatively soak in cold water for several hours. Dry to prevent rotting, before sowing. Germination takes 3-8 weeks.

Suitable for seeding in pots (2-3 seeds per pot) [5, 12]. Sow thinly before conditions become too warm to avoid problems caused by the seed rotting [13].

Suitable for direct seeding when sufficient seed is available [1, 2, 5]. The seed retains viability for many years [1, 5, 14].

Cuttings may be successful but are often slow to strike and may not produce a vigorous root system [14].

D. latifolia would be a useful plant in cultivation as it has an attractive growth habit and is very colourful when in flower [14]. Plants require a well-drained soil in a sunny or partly shaded position [9, 14]. It is a fast growing species [12] and is frost hardy [12, 13]. It is a useful plant for informal hedges or native hedgerows, and for improving soil fertility, through 'fixing' nitrogen [5, 10, 12]. The flowers provide pollen and nectar, food for various insects and native birds [2, 5, 12].

The bitter-tasting leaves were used by indigenous people when infused in water to make an invigorating tonic and to treat fever [11]. The bitter tasting leaves are said to have medicinal properties, and a decoction of leaves was made by European settlers to expel intestinal worms, and as a tonic [5]. The leaves have been used as a substitute for hops [3, 5, 10]. The leaves and stems are also reported to produce a fawn dye with alum as a mordant.

Daviesia regenerates from seed or suckers, particularly after fire [12]. Other *Daviesia* species establish well from direct seeding, although seed shortages may preclude this method [12].

Daviesia are reasonably hardy plants but occasionally seem to die quickly and without warning. This may be due to *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, as the root rot fungus has been isolated from plants that have died in this manner [4].

References

[1] Ralph, M. (1993). *Seed Collection of Australian Native Plants For Revegetation, Tree Planting and Direct Seeding.* 2nd ed. Fitzroy, Victoria: Bushland Horticulture.

[2] Carr, D. (1997). *Plants in Your Pants: a pocket guide for the identification and use of the common plants of the northwest slopes.* Greening Australia NSW, Armidale.

[3] Walker, K., Burrows, G., and McMahon, L. (2001). *Bidgee Bush, An identification guide to common native plants species of the South Western Slopes of New South Wales.* Greening Australia, South West Slopes.

[4] Wrigley J. F., and Fagg M. (1988). *Australian Native Plants. Propagation, cultivation and use in landscaping.* 3rd Ed. Australia: William Collins Publishers.

[5] Stelling, F. (ed.) (1998). *South West Slopes Revegetation Guide.* Murray Catchment Management Committee, Albury, NSW.

[6] Crisp, M. D. (1991). Contributions towards a revision of *Daviesia* Smith *(Fabaceae: Mirbelieae).* II. *The *D. Latifolia* group. *Australian Systematic Botany* 4(2) 229 – 298. Online: **http://www.publish.csiro.au/paper/SB9910229.htm**

Internet links

[7] Friends of Grasslands, Grassland Quality Indicator Species List: **http://www.fog.org.au/indicator_species.htm**

[8] PlantNET National Herbarium of New South Wales: **http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/NSWfl.pl?page=nswfl&lvl=sp&name=Daviesia~latifolia**

[9] Australian Seed website: **http://www.australianseed.com/product_info.php/pName/daviesia-latifolia-bitter-pea**

[10] **http://users.nsw.chariot.net.au/~bpyallaroo/Daviesia_latifolia.htm**

[11] Taste Australia website: **http://www.tasteaustralia.biz/bush_medicine_30.html**

[12] Charles Sturt University Plant Database: **http://www.csu.edu.au/herbarium/davilati_sws.html**

[13] Tasmanian understorey network: **http://www.understorey-network.org.au/communities.html?species=Daviesia%20latifolia**

[14] Australian Native Plants Society: **http://asgap.org.au/d-lat.html**

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