

Plant of the Week

Exocarpos cupressiformis

Native Cherry

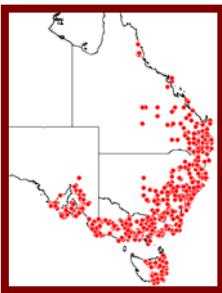
A dastardly parasite



Native Cherries, in all their innocence, look like conifers; they could perhaps be mistaken for soft foliated cypresses. But beneath the ground, the roots of these fiendish plants tap into the roots of other woody shrubs and trees and extract their nutrients. They do have a back-up system for nutrition, though; they can use their green leaves (reduced to tiny scales) and green stems for photosynthesis.

The **Native Cherry** belongs to the plant family **Santalaceae** which includes many other sneaky root parasites, including *Leptomeria acida*, the native current, *Santalum acuminatum*, the **Sweet Quandong** and *Santalum lanceolatum* the **Northern Sandalwood**. These plants are closely related to the mistletoes which belong to the family **Loranthaceae**. At least mistletoes are open about their parasitic lifestyle!

Native Cherry can be found in all eastern Australian mainland states, also in Tasmania and the south-eastern corner of South Australia. The fruit of Native Cherry is inedible, but the succulent stalk has been an important plant food for Aboriginal people and European settlers. The timber is now known by the name “cherry pine”.



Map: Generated 24.1.2011, Australia's Virtual Herbarium,
<http://avh.rbg.vic.gov.au/avh/>



Photos: J. Cooke

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