

Pittosporum angustifolium

**Weeping Pittosporum,
Bitter Bush, Desert
Willow,
Native Apricot**

Pittosporum angustifolium has a great swag of common names but when you look at its distribution, perhaps it should more appropriately be referred to as the *Inland Pittosporum*. It grows as a weeping shrub or small tree and is



Pittosporum angustifolium
Atlas of Living Australia

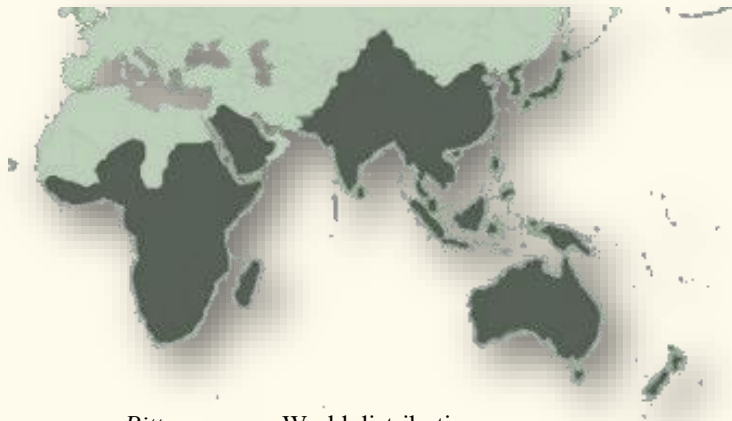
endemic to inland areas of mainland Australia. This sturdy, long-lived, drought- and frost-tolerant plant can survive in areas of exceptionally low rainfall and is prized by gardeners for its bright orange fruit and weeping habit. *Pittosporum* belongs in the plant family Pittosporaceae which has ancient origins in eastern Australia. It is generally not considered to be a Gondwanan genus as there is little evidence to show that it was widespread in the other landmasses (e.g. Africa, South America) associated with Gondwana. There are nine genera in the family, collectively including about 160 species. Seven of the nine genera are Australian endemics, that is, they occur *only* in Australia and nowhere else in the world. One exception is the exquisitely fragrant Native Frangipani (*Hymenosporum flavum*) which occurs from coastal eastern



Pittosporum angustifolium – fruits
Photograph: Rosemary Stapleton



Pittosporum tobira - a native of Japan, Taiwan, China and Korea
Photo: Jim Evans, CC BY-SA 4.0
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons



Pittosporum – World distribution
Modified from Kew Plants Online

widely dispersed across Australia, New Zealand and New Caledonia, but throughout the Palaeotropics, including islands of the Pacific, Southeast Asia, China, Japan, Africa and Madagascar but is not present in the Americas.

Australia to Papua New Guinea. A second genus (*Pittosporum*) that bears the name of the family, has outperformed all other Pittosporaceae genera and conquered the world! Not only is the genus *Pittosporum*



Pittosporum angustifolium – flowers
Photograph: Rosemary Stapleton



Pittosporum undulatum – a species common in Sydney bushland much maligned as an invasive species both in Australia and overseas.

The first *Pittosporum* to be recorded by Europeans was *Pittosporum tobira* in Japan about 1690. Surprisingly, the first record of *Pittosporum* in Australia was *not* collected by Joseph Banks in 1770, as you might think, rather by the English privateer, explorer and naturalist, William Dampier, in 1699, from Shark Bay in the north-west of Western Australia. The specimen collected by Dampier was *Pittosporum phillyreoides*, restricted to the Kimberley coast. The much more widely distributed Weeping Pittosporum (*P. angustifolium*) featured here was once included in Dampier's *Pittosporum phillyreoides* but has since been identified as a species in its own right.

When organisms or species are restricted to a single defined geographic location, such as a country, an island, or a mountain, they are

referred to as being *endemic* to that location. Australia may well be the place of origin for *Pittosporum*, but the locations with the highest levels of endemism for species of *Pittosporum* are New Caledonia which has 45 species, New Zealand (21 species) and the Hawaiian Islands (11 species). Recent molecular studies confirm multiple dispersal events from Australia to islands across the Pacific and Indian Oceans. We still understand little of this phenomenon. What are the traits that enable relatively closely related species within one genus to achieve such contrasting success in colonising islands and distant landmasses?

Alison Downing, Brian Atwell, Rosemary Stapleton, Karen Marais, Kevin Downing and our thanks to the Orange Field Naturalists and Conservation Society

Atlas of Living Australia:

https://biocache.ala.org.au/occurrences/search?q=taxa%3A%22Pittosporum+undulatum%22#tab_map_View

Cayzer L W, Crisp M D, Telford I R H. 2000. Revision of *Pittosporum* (Pittosporaceae) in Australia.

Australian Systematic Botany 13: 845-902. <https://doi.org/10.1071/SB99021>

Chandler G T, Plunkett G M, Pinney S M, Cayzer L W, Gemmill C E C. 2007. Molecular and morphological agreement in Pittosporaceae: phylogenetic analysis with nuclear ITS and plastid *trnL-trnF* sequence data. *Australian Systematic Botany*, 20:390-401.

Clarkson FM, Clarkson B D, Gemmill C E C. 2012. Biological flora of New Zealand 13. *Pittosporum cornifolium*, tāwhiri karo, cornel-leaved pittosporum. *New Zealand Journal of Botany*, 50(2): 185-201, DOI: 10.1080/0028825X.2011.645547

Kew Science, Plants of the World Online: [Pittosporum Banks ex Gaertn.](#) | [Plants of the World Online](#) | [Kew Science](#)

Plantnet: <https://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/NSWfl.pl?page=nswfl&lvl=gn&name=Pittosporum>

Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pittosporum_angustifolium Wikipedia: [Pittosporaceae - Wikipedia](#)



Pittosporum revolutum – a species common in Sydney bushland



Pittosporum tenuifolium – kōhūhū – in Aoraki Mount Cook Village, Canterbury, New Zealand. Photo: Krzysztof Ziarnek, Kenraiz, CC BY-SA 4.0
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons



MACQUARIE
University
SYDNEY • AUSTRALIA





Pittosporum angustifolium growing on a limestone hillside west of Orange, NSW. Photograph courtesy of Richard Medd



Pittosporum angustifolium – fruits
Photographs: Rosemary Stapleton

