

Plant of the Week

*Podocarpus
elatus*

**Plum Pine,
Brown Pine**



When we hear the word *conifer*, we immediately think of trees that produce seeds in cones. A striking exception is *Podocarpus* which produces single seeds attached to branches by swollen, fleshy, plum-like, stalks (receptacles). Hence we use the name *Plum Pine* for *Podocarpus elatus*, a tree of littoral and dry rainforests along the eastern coast and ranges of New South Wales and Queensland. *P. elatus* is **dioecious**, with male (pollen) cones on male trees, and single (rarely double) ovules produced on female trees. However, not all *Podocarpus* species are **dioecious**.

There are about 105 *Podocarpus* species in the world today. The genus first appeared in the fossil record in the Early Triassic, 250 million years ago, prior to the break-up of Pangaea. The genus evolved in the southern part of Pangaea, and its present day distribution in Australia, New Zealand, New Caledonia, South America and South Africa reflects its Gondwanan origins. Some species reached New Guinea, spreading along the Malay Archipelago to Southern China, Japan and the Philippines.

The timber of *P. elatus* has been used for a variety of purposes, including furniture, boats, musical instruments and jetties. It is a popular ornamental tree in Sydney. The fleshy receptacles (“plums”) were eaten by Aboriginal people.

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(唐爱森, 唐科文 - 2011年5月1日)

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Photograph: A.J. Downing



Map: Australia's Virtual Herbarium <http://chah.gov.au/avh/>

