

Plant of the Week

## *Elaeocarpus reticulatus* Blueberry Ash



This lovely tree grows in gullies along the coast and ranges of eastern Australia, from southern Queensland, through New South Wales and Victoria to Flinders Island and King Island in Bass Strait. In late spring and early summer, **Blueberry Ash** produce masses of dainty, fringed, creamy-white or pink, cup-shaped flowers. These are later followed by bright, dark-blue fruits, much loved by **Currawongs** and **Crimson Rosellas**. Plants in the bush, when not in flower or in fruit, can often be identified by young leaves variously coloured cream, orange, scarlet or crimson. It has become a very popular plant with Sydney gardeners. Just recently **Blueberry Ash** were planted on Wahroonga Railway Station to replace the weeping figs that were, unfortunately, deemed to be too hazardous for commuters.

The name *Elaeocarpus* is derived from the Greek ελαιοκάρπου [*elaia* meaning **olive** and *karpos* **fruit**]. The specific name *reticulatus* is derived from the Latin, and refers to the 'net-like' venation of the leaf.



**Blueberry Ash** usually grows along watercourses in gullies, close to rainforest or wet sclerophyll forest. However, in areas of urban bushland where fires are less frequent than in early times, **Blueberry Ash** now appears to be colonising the upper slopes of gullies and even ridge tops. This is a characteristic of another local indigenous plant *Pittosporum undulatum* (Native Daphne) which has become a problem invasive plant. Blueberry Ash has the potential to create problems similar to those created by *Pittosporum*, most notably blocking light from sun loving species (for example, *Xanthorrhoea* spp. and *Banksia* spp.) that are unable

to survive in shaded situations. So although Blueberry Ash, particularly the pink form, is much sought after as a garden plant, bushland regenerators regard it with caution, wary of its potential to invade inappropriate bushland areas.

Map: *Australia's Virtual Herbarium*, accessed 15.xi.2010

*Alison Downing & Kevin Downing*, 15.xi.2010

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