

Getting to know your local Casuarinas and Allocasuarinas

The trees we all call Casuarinas are spread throughout the Bouddi peninsula. Examples can be found in almost all of our plant communities from ridgetop to alluvial flats. Although they are an integral part of so many Australian landscapes, they are not universally loved.

They are easily recognised by their distinctive dull green, segmented branchlets. As these were seen to resemble the plumage of the cassowary the name Casuarina was given, derived from the Malay word for Cassowary (kasuari).

The family is called Casuarinaceae and is native to Australia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. It contains four genera including Allocasuarina, which is endemic to Australia, and Casuarina, which has several representatives in Australia. The other two genera are almost exclusively tropical.

Casuarinaceae have evolved to thrive in tough exposed conditions with poor soils such as sandy coastal foreshores, riverbanks, dry grassy woodlands, desolate rocky sites or swampy alluvial flats. They have no close relatives.

The leaves are minute scales that circle each joint of the green branchlets. The woody fruit are produced by the female plants and the rust coloured flowers are more prominent on the male plants. The roots have nitrogen fixing nodules and inhibit the growth of other plants under their canopy. They are fire sensitive, burning easily and only regenerating from seed after fire.

The seeds provide food for many birds. They are the preferred food source for glossy black cockatoos.

The similarity of the timber to oak was recognised by Captain Cook and the common name she-oak is said to be a chauvinistic reference to the timber being difficult to work and inferior to real oak.

Aboriginal uses included spear making from the timber, using an infusion of the inner bark as a gargle for toothache and chewing the young fruit to stimulate saliva production. The mat of fallen needle-like foliage under sheoaks was considered a safe place to leave children as snakes were said to avoid these areas.

On the Bouddi peninsula we have four species: *Casuarina glauca*, *Allocasuarina distyla*, *Allocasuarina littoralis* and *Allocasuarina torulosa*. The easiest ways to differentiate these species is to by location and by the shape of their woody fruit which are quite distinctive for each species.

Casuarina glauca (Swamp oak)

Almost all the casuarinas found by the water's edge of Brisbane Water belong to this species. It can grow up to 20m and has a well developed lateral root system and the tendency to form vigorous root suckers.

It flowers between September and October. The fruit is spherical and is much smaller than of the other species.

Swamp oak fruit



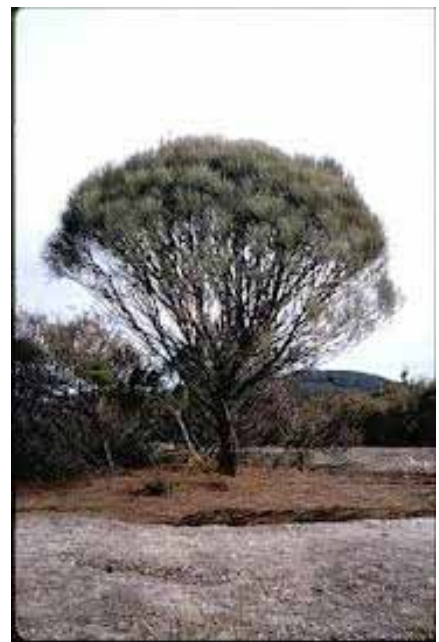
A flowering male Swamp oak



Allocasuarina distyla (Scrub sheoak)

This hardy species grows on the exposed slopes facing Broken Bay and the ocean. Many examples can be seen around Lobster Beach and on the sandstone headlands of Box Head. It is the smallest of the local species, growing to between 2 and 5 m depending on the environment.

It flowers between July and September



***Allocasuarina littoralis* (Black oak)**

This species grows along the entire east coast and is the most common of this family in Australia.

It grows to about 12m and flowers in the Autumn months. On the Bouddi peninsula it can be found on the slopes and the ridgetops. Most of the allocasuarinas on Wards Hill Rd belong to this species.



***Allocasuarina torulosa* (Forest oak)**

This species likes to grow on the fringes of rain forest and is found in the wetter gullies on the Bouddi peninsula. It grows to between 15 – 30 m high and has a distinctive rough brown bark. The woody fruit is large and spherical with the seeds arranged in longitudinal columns.

