SPOT THE DIFFERENCE …Gail Slykhuis photos Ellinor Campbell, Peter Brighton

Similarities between plant species can often lead to incorrect identification and, in some cases the subsequent spread of, environmental weeds which have originated from other Australian states and become naturalised in Victoria. For example, it can be hard to spot the differences between the following bipinnate-leaved wattles growing in our area; Black Wattle, *Acacia mearnsii*, and Early Black Wattle, *Acacia decurrens.*

Black Wattle is a 10 m–15 m tree, which is widespread in our open forests and heathy woodlands. It is often confused with Early Black Wattle which grows to a similar size and has similar dark fissured bark, as described by the common names. The interloper, Early Black Wattle originated from NSW and is now naturalised in all eastern states of Australia.

Although these species generally flower at different times and the flowers are of differing shades of yellow, these features should not be relied on for identification purposes. Plant identification relies on the observation of many plant features.

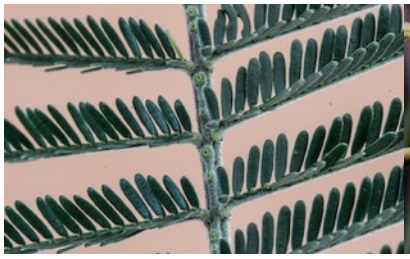
The arrangement of glands on the rachis (main axis of a compound leaf) provides a useful identification tool; a hand lens may be useful to see the glands clearly. Interestingly these glands excrete nectar which attracts insects and occasional birds.

The leaf bases also provide a significant identification tool as well as the botanical name for Early Black Wattle, where wing-like ridges extend down the stem, described as 'decurrent', meaning 'running down'.

The following table introduces further distinguishing features.

Feature	**Black Wattle *Acacia mearnsii***	**Early Black-wattle *Acacia decurrens***
Arrangement of glands along the rachis	A raised gland at the base of each pinna pair as well as additional glands which are irregularly spaced.	A raised highly visible gland at the base of each pinna pair.
Rachis surface	Pubescent (soft short hairs)	Glabrous (smooth)
Leaf base		Decurrent
Branchlets	Angular, slightly ribbed	Prominently angular
Spacing & nature of leaflets/ pinnules	Leaflets / pinnules crowded, pubescent.	Leaflets / pinnules well separated, glabrous (smooth).
Flowering Times	Sept–Nov.	July–Sept.

Black Wattle L-R



Glands and leaflets

Leaf base

Flowers

Gland and leaflets

Leaf base

Early Black Wattle L-R

Flowers