

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE: STRINGYBARKS... *Gail Slykhuís*

Messmate Stringybark, *Eucalyptus obliqua*.

Apart from being the first described eucalypt collected from southeast Australia during Cook's third voyage (1777), Messmate, *Eucalyptus obliqua*, is the most widespread eucalypt in our area, growing in coastal locations, foothills and ranges. Its growth habit will vary depending on environmental conditions: exposed coastal sites producing stunted low growing trees, sheltered forests producing tall, straight growth.



Messmate fruit

It is also one of the easiest eucalypts to identify due to its characteristic stringybark which is grey-brown in colour, the bark being persistent from the trunk to small branches. Tear off a piece of bark to see how stringy it is.

The dark green colour, asymmetrical shape, distinct veins and oblique leaf base of the leaves also provide useful identification features.

The club-shaped flower buds with their small smooth caps are in clusters of 7–15, goblet shaped fruits develop from the nectar rich flowers. The bud cluster is supported by a lengthy stalk (peduncle). The fruit usually has four openings (valves) which are below the rim of the fruit.

Flowering is generally between January and March.

Brown Stringybark, *Eucalyptus baxteri*.

Brown Stringybark is found growing near the coast as well as into the foothills of our area. Coastal trees will be smaller than those growing in the foothills where they may reach to 40 m. Their potential is far less than that of Messmates which can reach 70 m in a forested situation.

The rough, stringy, brown bark of this species also persists into the smaller branches.



Brown Stringybark fruit

While both stringybarks show similar leaf features, the Brown Stringybark has slightly darker green leaves. However, it is the appearance of buds and fruits which will be most valuable in separating the two.

The club-shaped buds arranged in clusters of 5–10 are supported on a stout stalk which is shorter than that of the Messmate. The warty bud caps will become noticeable as the buds age.

The fruit are wider and more rounded than the Messmate and the four valves are prominent as they protrude above the rim of the fruit.

Flowering is generally between December and April

Ref. Margaret MacDonald, *Flowers of Anglesea and Aireys Inlet*



Messmate leaves and flower buds



Brown Stringybark leaves and flower buds

Leon Costermans, *Native Trees and Shrubs of South-East Australia* Revised Ed. 1983

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ANGAIR Inc. (R/N A0002974W) 3C McMillan Street, Anglesea, Vic. 3230

Phone: (03) 5263 1085 e-mail: admin@angair.org.au

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