

SHEOAKS AND HEOAKS - WHAT MAKES AN (ALLO-) CASUARINA?

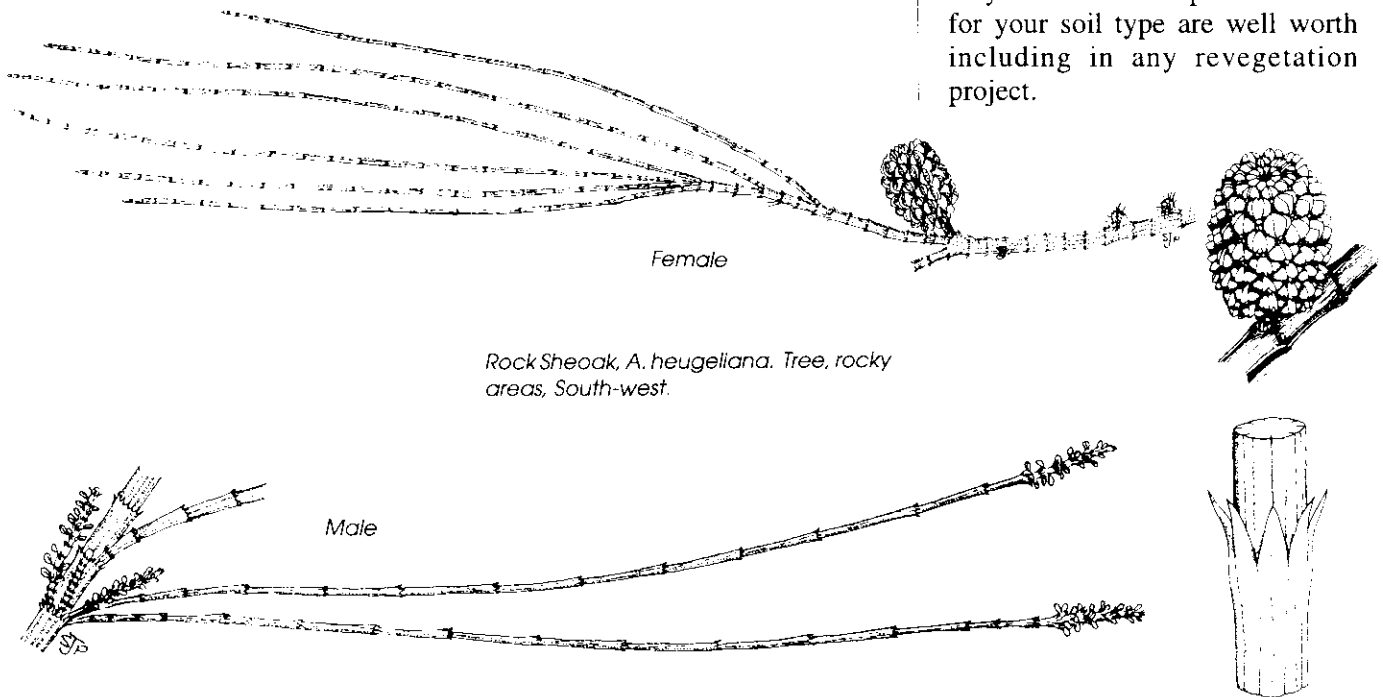
As sheoaks in wetlands, forests and rock outcrops, or tamma in scrub country, casuarinas are an important part of WA's vegetation.

All sheoaks have separate male and female flowers, and some, such as Rock Sheoak (*Allocasuarina heugeliana*) have separate male and female trees. The male trees turn a beautiful rusty brown when in flower. Female trees can be recognised by their cones.

Sheoak needles are really thin, flexible branches. The leaves have been reduced to tiny scales which circle the stems like paper crowns, while the branches themselves do the photosynthesis. After sometime, the needles are shed and form a thick layer of leaf litter beneath the tree which effectively prevents most other plants from growing. A few orchids, however, specialise in this site, and the rare Smooth-lipped Spider Orchid, *Caladenia integra*, is almost confined to dense Rock Sheoak stands.

Sheoak roots contain nitrogen fixing bacteria, helping to put nitrogen back into the soil, and so the foliage is often highly nutritious. Grey Kangaroos, especially, are very partial to the young plants. Parrots often ringbark small shoots to get at the sweet sap beneath, especially during autumn, when alternative sources of food are restricted.

There are about 22 native species of Sheoaks in WA. Collect both needles and mature female cones to enable identification. Sheoak seed is easy to collect and direct seeds very well. The local species suitable for your soil type are well worth including in any revegetation project.

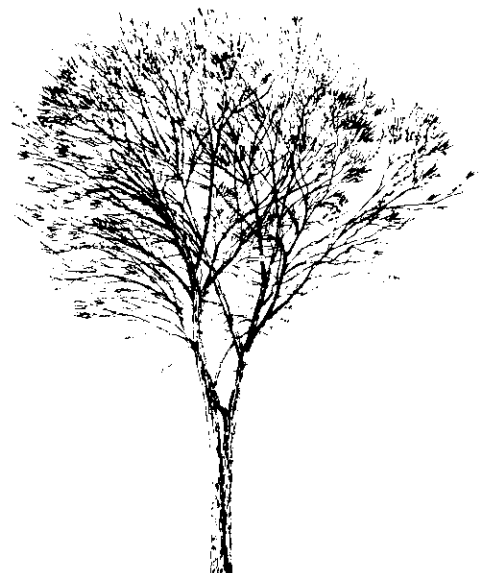


How did Sheoak get its name?

The generic name comes from the Malay word "casuari" or cassowary, because the foliage was thought to look like that bird's drooping tail feathers. The early settlers thought the wood resembled oak, but, being not as strong, it became "sheoak". And why the "Allo-"? The genus has been divided

into two, depending on features of the seed. "Allo" means "like", so most of our sheoaks are now *Allocasuarina* "like casuarina". The only true *Casuarina* native to WA is Salt Sheoak, *C. obesa*.

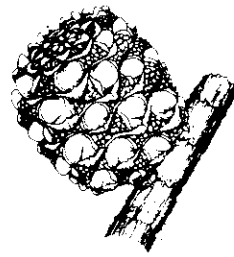
Would you like to know more about what plant names mean? It helps one to remember the latin name, sometimes! The book "Western Australian plant names and their meanings" by F.A. Sharr. Uni WA Press, 1978, is a mine of information!



PRACTICALITIES

Sheoaks for revegetation

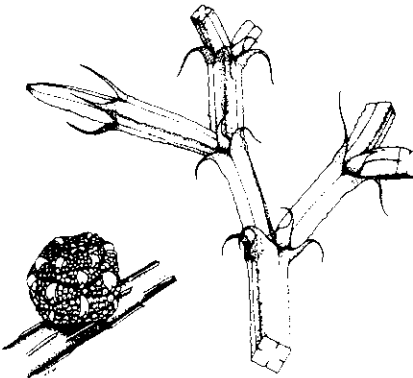
The following drawings will help you identify sheoaks for revegetation seed collection. The drawings of cones and needles are taken from 'Flora of Australia' Vol 3, the rest are by Margaret Peironi from 'Leaf and Branch' CALM.



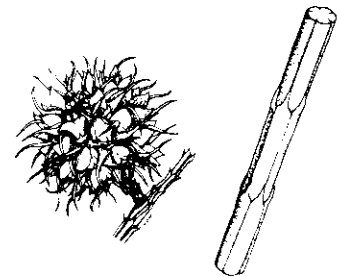
Common Sheoak, *A. fraseriana*. Tree on laterite or sand in higher rainfall areas.



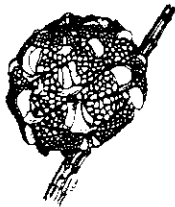
Tamma, *A. campestris*. Large shrub, widespread in the wheatbelt.



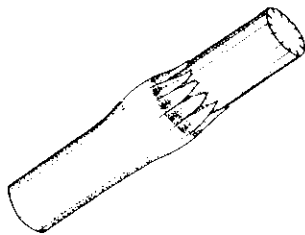
Tiny Sheoak, *A. microstachya*. Very small, dense low shrub on gravel in the wheatbelt.



Horned Sheoak, *A. thuyoides*. Medium shrub on laterite and gravelly sand in the wheatbelt.



Karri Sheoak, *A. decussata*. Large tree in very high rainfall areas.



Salt Sheoak, *C. obesa*. Tree, saline or waterlogged sites throughout the South-west.

