

WEMBLEY WAX

After the article on weedy natives in the last issue of Western Wildlife, a number of people enquired about the local Perth waxflower, Wembley wax. Greg Keighery explains:

Geraldton wax is a widespread and variable species occurring in many discrete and overlapping populations along the coast between Kalbarri and Fremantle (the type collection was made at the Roundhouse in Fremantle, so perhaps the common name is misleading!). There are also a few scattered populations on calcareous soils inland extending from north of Gingin to Watheroo.

There are two discrete subspecies; the Kalbarri form (tall slender few branched shrub with large broad leaves, large terminal heads of flowers with strongly ribbed floral tubes) and the widespread southern form from Dongara to Perth, which contains numerous variants. In the Perth region wild wax only grows on the Quindalup dunes by the coast, hence any plants or populations away from this landform can be assumed to be cultivated or weeds.

Cultivated plants (Geraldton wax) have large often coloured flowers (pink, purple or white, see left side of figure 1), which flower over a much longer period than the local form, from winter through to late spring. Plants that have seeded revert to pale pink flowers (upper right figure 1), but retain the lengthy flowering period. However, these plants have longer mature leaves (30-40 mm) compared to 12-20 mm for the Wembley wax, and have very discrete gaps on the stem between the leaves. The local wild form of the species has small pale pink flowers (petals 4-5 mm long compared to 7-9 mm), with short leaves crowded at the ends of the branches (lower

right side of figure 1). Geraldton wax plants tend to be larger and less spreading than Wembley wax plants.

Hybrids between Geraldton wax and Wembley wax have been found around the Quarry in Bold Park (central lower plant in Figure 1).



Figure 1: Waxes from Bold Park. Clockwise from top left, Chamelaucium "purple pride"; Reverted wild form of Geraldton wax. Wembley wax (note very crowded leaves and in late bud compared to woody and cultivated forms); hybrid between Geraldton wax and Wembley wax from slopes above quarry; Geraldton wax "Alba" white cultivar.