

Tree Profile: *Banksia* Species

General Information:

There are currently 76 known and identified species of *Banksia*, most of which are located in Western Australia. Eighteen *Banksia* are found in the eastern half of Australia or in tropical regions. *Banksia* are related to the Protea family of Africa, with which they share many similarities. *Banksia* are an evergreen tree or shrub, although prostrate versions also exist. They have usually either a single trunk with an irregular outline, or a multi-trunk shrubby appearance.

Banksia can have a variety of leaf shapes and sizes, but are usually tough and leathery. The leaves may grow alternately or in whorls. Flowers are also variable but are usually numerous on a spike which becomes woody. Flowers set at the end of new growth and take some time to mature. Flower spikes tend to be large, so are not often seen on *Banksia* bonsai.

Lighting: Full sun!!!

Temperature: Most of the common *Banksia* found locally can tolerate all temperatures found in Melbourne. They thrive in the warmer weather but can sulk a bit over winter.

Watering: Although *Banksia* can survive in the Australian bush during drought conditions, they need plenty of water in pot culture.

Feeding: *Banksia* are a hungry species! Fertilise generously with Native Osmocote in the potting mix and liquid feed every week or two (except winter) with a mild liquid fertilizer like Maxicrop, Charlie Carp, Powerfeed or similar. *Banksia* in the bush can be subject to proteoid roots which make them susceptible to high phosphorus fertilisers, however most *Banksia* sourced from nursery stock would not suffer from this problem. If in doubt, start your fertilizing regime with a diluted liquid fertilizer and gradually build up to full recommended strength.

Pruning and Wiring: Hard prune when the tree is growing strongly, typically from late spring through early summer. Full or partial defoliation can be done at this time to increase ramification and reduce leaf size. The foliage needs to be managed carefully to obtain small leaves and ramification. The internodes lengthen very quickly if the tree is allowed to grow unchecked. They should be pinched as soon as the terminal shoot begins to extend and before the second set of leaves develop, during the growing season. Leave a little more foliage on in Autumn to get them through the winter period.

Propagation: *Banksia* can be grown easily from seed, but cuttings and air layering are other options. Pot the young trees up and on quickly, always up to the next pot size. Do not over pot!

Repotting: *Banksia* have a fibrous root system which makes root pruning very easy, and provided it is done at the right time of the year (during the warmer months) recovery should be quick. Partially defoliate before repotting. Use a free-draining potting mix. Keep the tree in the shade for a few weeks after repotting until it shows signs of new growth.

Pests and Diseases: A healthy tree grown in free-draining mix in full sun should have few problems. As usual, be vigilant and if fungus, mould, caterpillars or scale is observed, then treat appropriately.

Species Suitable for Bonsai: There are three main varieties of *Banksia* used as bonsai in Victoria—*B. integrifolia*, *B. serrata*, and *B. marginata*. *Integrifolia* and *serrata* are best, *marginata* can be a bit delicate at times.

Banksia integrifolia—Coast *Banksia*. Variable in size up to 25m. Pale yellow flower spikes.

Banksia serrata—Old Man *Banksia* or Saw Tooth *Banksia*. A gnarled and mis-shapen tree ranging in size from 1m to 16m. Yellow or greyish-yellow flower spikes.

Banksia marginata—Silver *Banksia*. Dense foliage and highly variable, ranging from a small shrub to a 12m tree. Yellow Flower spikes.

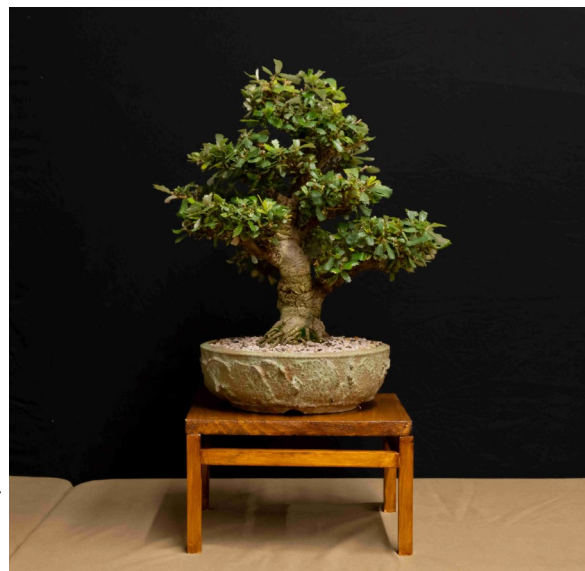
Banksia spinulosa, var. 'Birthday Candles'. A dwarf form with dense foliage and golden flower spikes, which may be small enough to remain on bonsai forms of the tree.

References: Grant Bowie—YVBS newsletter 2008, Craig Wilson—YVBS newsletter 2011.

All photos are of YVBS members' trees.



Banksia serrata



Banksia integrifolia



Banksia spinulosa "Birthday Candles"