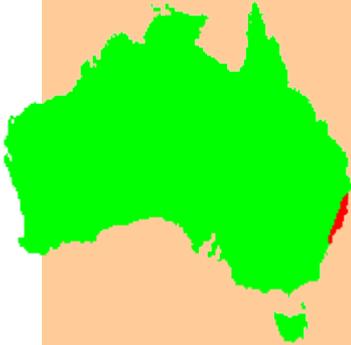


Ceratopetalum gummiferum



Family: Cunoniaceae

Distribution: Open forest and rainforest of New South Wales, generally east of the Great Dividing Range.

Common Name: New South Wales Christmas bush

Derivation of Name: *Ceratopetalum*....from Greek *ceras*, a horn and *petalon*, a petal, referring to the petal shape of one species. *gummiferum*....producing a gum

Conservation Status: Not considered to be at risk in the wild.

General Description:

Ceratopetalum is a small genus of 5 species, all occurring in Australia and New Guinea. *C.gummiferum* is the best known species and is widely cultivated both in Australia and overseas.



The white flowers of *Ceratopetalum gummiferum* appear in October...



...followed by the red sepals at around Christmas time.

Photos: Brian Walters

NSW Christmas bush is generally a large shrub or small tree which may reach 10 metres in its natural habit but is usually much smaller in cultivation where it rarely exceeds 5 metres. The foliage of the plant is very attractive. The leaves are up to 70mm long and are divided into three leaflets which are finely serrated. The new growth is often pink or bronze coloured.



A mature NSW Christmas Bush in full display

Photo: Brian Walters

The main attraction of the plant is the massed display of the red sepals of the developing seed capsules which are commonly mistaken to be flowers. These are at their peak in early to mid summer, usually at Christmas in Australia. The true flowers are white in colour and are seen in late spring, although they are not particularly conspicuous.

The sepals and foliage are widely used for cut flowers and the plant is farmed commercially for that purpose.

In cultivation the plant must have a well drained but moist position in sun or semi shade. Annual feeding with a slow release fertiliser is beneficial.

C.gummiferum can be propagated by seed or cuttings. However, as the intensity of the red coloration can vary from very pale to deep red in seedling-grown plants, propagation from cuttings is preferred.