

# WILGA

## *Geijera parviflora*

The colloquial name Wilga is an Aboriginal name describing the tree. It is also commonly known as Native Willow in reference to the form of the tree.

*Geijera* is after J D Geijer, a botanical author, while *parviflora* is derived from the Latin meaning small flower. Wilga is a member of the Citrus family

*Geijera* is a Genus of 5 species of trees and shrubs native to Australia.

The most common species in South Australia is Oil Bush or Soap Bush (*G. linearifolia*) which is a small compact, broad woody shrub extending from the Nullarbor through the Flinders and the mallee belt to the Victorian border. Two of the timber species, known commercially as Green Satin-heart (*G. muelleri* and *G. salicifolia*) are trees of the coastal rainforests of New South Wales and Queensland.



at the Waite Arboretum

Wilga is a small tree or bush found occurring naturally on red sandy loams inland in semi-arid regions of eastern Australia, from South Australia near Burra, through northern Victoria, New South Wales to Queensland. It may grow to 10 metres tall with drooping or pendant branches. In its natural environment these pendulous branches may reach the ground, almost forming a tall compact hedge. The specimens in the Waite Arboretum certainly show this characteristic, while the specimen in the Mallee Gardens of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens shows a more erect form (through pruning). The drooping branches have linear to spear shaped leaves growing up to 180mm long and to 10mm wide. They are pale to bright green in colour and resemble those of the willow, thus the common name Native Willow.



upright Wilga at the Botanic Gardens

The leaves give off a fruity aroma when they are crushed. Aboriginal people chewed the aromatic leaves for toothache. The small white-petalled flowers occur between June and November. The aroma of the flowers is often described as foetid, attracting blowflies or often a contradictory view as strong smelling or citrus scented attracting insects. The fruit are globular in shape, around 5 mm long.



Although native to the arid areas of eastern Australia, Wilga is now being planted as a shade tree, and the City of West Torrens has planted it as a street tree. In agricultural areas it is useful as a fodder tree. Sheep particularly enjoy grazing on the lower branches, pruning the trees to form a park-lands setting, although trees appear to vary greatly in palatability. Despite being slow growing, it is planted in Australia and overseas as an ornamental. Wilga is reported as being fire and drought resistant.

The wood is pale yellowish brown and is very dense weighing about 945 Kg per cub metre (c.f. Jarrah 820 Kg per cub metre). The wood is close grained and has a pleasant aroma when cut. The economic value of the wood is reduced by its tendency to split and contain gum veins. Often the heartwood has a greenish colour and is often called Greenheart, although that name is more correctly applied to the two larger species from coastal NSW and Queensland (*G. muelleri* and *G. salicifolia*) which are usually referred to as Green Satin-heart.



In the eastern states Wilga is often confused with Dogwood (*Eremophila bignoniflora*). Wilga looks very similar to Dogwood from a distance but the most significant difference between the two is the smell. When you crush the leaves, or cut Wilga timber green, it has a lovely fruity smell, while Dogwood leaves smell like dogs urine, hence the name.

**References**

*Plants of Central Queensland*, Eric Anderson, DPI  
*Native Trees of South Australia*, C D Boomsma, Woods and Forests Dept  
*Wood in Australia*, Keith R Bootle, McGraw Hill  
*Australian Trees*, Ivan Holliday, Landsowne Publishing