

## Australian Native Hibiscus

There are many plants that are commonly called Native Hibiscus. All true native hibiscus plants belong to the Malvaceae family commonly known as the mallow family. Australian representatives may be herbs, shrubs or trees and include *Abelmoschus*, *Abutilon*, *Alyogyne*, *Gossypium*, *Lagunaria*, *Malva* and *Radyera*. They range from ground covers, *Abelmoschus moschatus* ssp *tuberosus*, to small plants, *Hibiscus trionum*, to medium shrubs, *Alyogyne huegelii*, and tall trees *Lagunaria patersonia*.

Most grow in sub-tropical and tropical areas but some species are adaptable to temperate climates that have regular summer rain and reliable winter rain. These include *Hibiscus splendens* and *H. diversifolius*, *Alyogyne hakeifolia*, *A. huegelii*, *H. heterophyllus* and *H. tiliaceus*. Some grow even in drought or on hot roadsides with no adverse effects.

### Generally:

Flowers, depending on the species, may be white, various shades of yellow, pink, purple, or red. Like other members of the Malvaceae family the flowers open in the morning and last one day but can produce hundreds of blooms per season. Most plants are perennials, with *Hibiscus trionum* treated as an annual in cooler zones. Flowering times vary according to the species but in a subtropical climate by planting a range of species it is possible to have plants flowering throughout the year. The flowers produce nectar for nectar-eating birds and predators but also attract insects for insect eaters. In addition, the seed capsules of species such as *H. heterophyllus* can provide for seed-eaters. All combining to encourage natural pest control in the garden.

These plants may be susceptible to frosts but are hardy in areas of light frosts although *H. heterophyllus* and *H. splendens* needs extra protection in frost prone areas. *Gossypium australe* and *G. sturtianum* are frost resistant. Some, if taken by frost will reshoot from the base.

The hairy seed pods of the *Hibiscus diversifolius*, *H. heterophyllus*, *H. splendens* and *Abelmoschus manihot*, may cause severe skin irritations. Use sticky tape to remove irritant hairs from the skin.

### Pest and Diseases

Well grown plants usually are less likely to be bothered by either pests or disease especially as they are bird attracting and they will usually clean up any pest. Hibiscus beetle may be an issue chewing holes in the flower petals. Harlequin bugs suck sap and may need to be controlled. Scale insects may also

pose a problem but can be removed by hand or by cutting out the affected branches.

### **Uses:**

**Hedging:** *Hibiscus heterophyllus*, *H. splendens*, *H. divaricatus*, *H. insularis* is salt resistant, pink form of *H. diversifolius* low screen

From the New South Wales border north, *H. tiliaceus* grows as a spreading tree that can grow as tall as 9 m and spread as wide as 16 m. *H. diversifolius* grows well underneath and the flowers go well together. For inland gardens, *Gossypium species* such as *G. sturtianum* can provide a screen approximately 1.5 m. For a formal garden, the pyramidal shape of *Lagunaria patersonia* could be used in Sydney and areas north of there for a tall screen and *H. insularis* makes a good hedge plant and windbreak (13) where a lower screen is required.

### **Feature planting:**

*H. heterophyllus* and *H. splendens* respond well to being trained to have clear trunks, *Lagunaria patersonia* and *L. queenslandica* both small beautiful trees. *Alyogyne huegelii*, *Hibiscus splendens* have unusual foliage as well as lovely flowers.

Mixed planting: mixed native hibiscus amongst other natives such as bird attracting grevilleas to provide contrast and a wide range of birds to the garden.

### **Container planting:**

All can be container grown though plants grown from cuttings develop a more fibrous root system than those grown from seed and therefore are better for containers. They also flower sooner than seed grown plants. Tip prune from young to develop a bushy plant that flowers freely and earlier than seed grown plants.

*Hibiscus heterophyllus*, *H. divaricatus* and *H. splendens* can be maintained as small plants

### **As Food:**

Caution should be taken before eating although no hibiscus is known to be poisonous. The petals of *Hibiscus heterophyllus* make a delicious preserve, cordial or syrup. *Abelmoschus manihot* has leaves that are high in protein.

Fibre can be produced from the bark of species such as *Hibiscus tiliaceus* and *H. tiliaceus* and *Thespesia* provide wood for a variety of purposes.

Below are some of my favourite native hibiscus plants. I love them although I have too much shade to grow them.

***H. tiliaceus* “*Rubra*”**- Red Cottonwood, Bronze Cottonwood, Red Beach Hibiscus

- It is a fast-growing evergreen tree 4 to 8 m high and wide.
- Striking large, distinct heart-shaped leaves. They display a deep, rich blend of burgundy, bronze, and dark green.
- Left unpruned it develops a broad, low crown offering excellent shade.
- Produces bright yellow flowers that feature a dark maroon centre. As the flowers age over the day, they turn deep orange and red before falling.
- Best grown in full sun to intensify the leave colour.
- It grows well in sand, loam, or heavy clay. While it prefers consistent moisture and tolerates poor drainage, it is remarkably waterwise and drought-tolerant once established.



Source: <https://www.benaranurseries.com/hibiscus-tiliaceus-rubra-cottonwood>



***H. heterophyllus*** – Native rosella, Toilet paper bush, Native Cottonwood, Native Hibiscus, Green Kurrajong

- A fast-growing shrub or small tree, 2-5m high.
- The branches and stems have fine irritating hairs or small prickles.
- The blooms are large up to 15 cm in diameter flowering from spring through autumn. They are typically white, pale pink or



<p>yellow always with a deep red-purple throat.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The leaves can be highly variable ranging from narrow, oval, entire leaves to deeply 3 to 5 lobed leaves. Heterophyllus means “different leaves”.</li> <li>• Uses include: bush tucker, strong fibres and highly bird attracting.</li> </ul>	
<p><b><i>H. splendens</i></b> – Pink Hibiscus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A fast-growing shrub 3-6m high.</li> <li>• The flowers are large, up to 15 cm in diameter, and of a typical hibiscus shape, pink with a deep red throat. Flowers from spring through to autumn.</li> <li>• Flowers produce hairy seed capsules containing a number of seeds.</li> <li>• Propagation is from seed. Germination can be sped up if the seed is abraded or soaked before planting. Cuttings strike easily.</li> </ul> <p>Source: <a href="https://anpsa.org.au/plant_profiles/hibiscus-splendens/">https://anpsa.org.au/plant_profiles/hibiscus-splendens/</a></p>	 <p><a href="https://www.deararborist.com.au/product/pinkhibiscus/97">https://www.deararborist.com.au/product/pinkhibiscus/97</a></p>
<p><b><i>Alyogyne huegelii</i></b> - formerly known as <i>Hibiscus huegelii</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A fast-growing shrub to 2.5m high and wide.</li> <li>• The flowers are lilac 7cm across with reddish-purple throats. Cultivars are found in shades of violet, blue, rose pink and white.</li> <li>• Flowers spring, summer and autumn.</li> <li>• The leaves are hairy, deeply 3 to 5 lobed and dull green.</li> <li>• Grow in full sun in a sheltered spot protected from strong winds.</li> <li>• Naturally occurring in sandy or gravelly soil they can be grown in heavy soil as long as it reasonably well drained and mulched.</li> </ul>	 <p><a href="https://www.gardenia.net/plant/alyogyne-huegelii">https://www.gardenia.net/plant/alyogyne-huegelii</a></p>

- Prune after their first flower flush in Spring. If left unpruned the lower limbs may become defoliated.
- Propagate from half hardened leaf-cuttings. Soft tip cutting also do well.

**Source:** <https://www.anbg.gov.au/gnp/gnp6/aly-hueg.html>

<https://gardeningwithangus.com.au/alyogyne-huegelii-west-coast-gem-native-hibiscus/>

**Lagunaria** – the Norfolk Island hibiscus.

- A small genus of two species *L. patersonia* and *L. queenslandica*. Differing in habits *L. patersonia* generally occurs in rainforests, while *L. queenslandica* is found in non-rainforest areas often along rivers and creeks. *L. patersonia* is well known in cultivation and has become naturalised in some areas of north-eastern NSW and has been used as street trees in some areas of Brisbane.
- They both are medium to large trees 12-20 m high with dense greyish-green oval shaped leaves covered in hairs when young.
- Flowers are pink hibiscus shaped appearing in leaf axils in spring and early summer.
- They are hardy to salt spray and perform best in well-drained soil in a sunny position.
- Propagate from seed by removing the seed from the capsules. Cutting strike easily.

**Source:** <https://gardeningwithangus.com.au/lagunaria-patersonia-norfolk-island-hibiscus/>



One of the largest obstacles to planting native hibiscus is the availability of plants in nurseries.