

R Nature Notes

Junior Ranger

WITCHETTY BUSH

If you live in Central Australia you might see this plant in your backyard and walk past without batting an eyelid - well it's time to stop, look and explore the world of the Witchetty Bush!

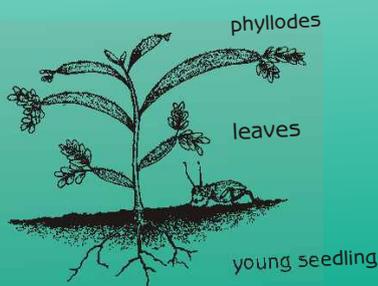


PERFECTLY AT HOME IN THE DESERT...

The Witchetty Bush lives in arid Central Australia and has some great adaptations for conserving water and living in the desert.

A TREE WITH NO LEAVES?

A Witchetty Bush doesn't have any leaves! It actually has 'phyllodes' which are like leaves, except they are better built for the desert environment. They start off as feathery leaves and then turn into phyllodes which are flattened leaf stalks. Phyllodes lose less water because they have fewer pores and don't sweat as much. They have fine hairs so water doesn't escape through evaporation.

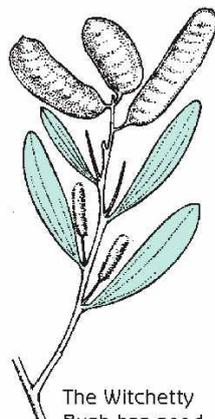


FUNNEL

The branches of a Witchetty Bush are shaped like an upside down umbrella. This helps the tree to collect water when it rains. The leaves catch the rain and funnel it down the branches to the base of the tree.

LEAVES OF GREEN.. WELL, DULL GREEN

Like many plants in Central Australia, the Witchetty Bush has dull greyish green leaves. They attract less heat than darker leaves, meaning less water loss.



The Witchetty Bush has seed pods, not fleshy fruit.



The yellow inflorescence (flowers) is shaped like a cylinder.

Look for the parallel veins on the phyllodes (leaves).

THE RIGHT ANGLE

The angle the leaves face can also minimise water loss. Have a close look at which way the Witchetty Bush leaves face. You'll notice they tend to point up. This means that only the edges of the leaf face the hot sun, so they lose less water.

DID YOU KNOW?

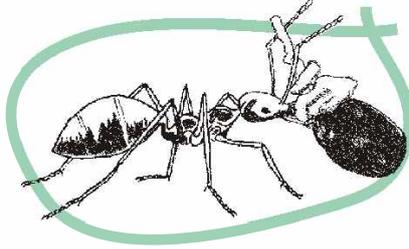
The scientific name for the Witchetty Bush is *Acacia kempeana*. Acacias are commonly called Wattle Trees. There are about 900 different types of Acacia in Australia.

BEDROOM, KITCHEN & NURSERY

Find out how the Witchetty Bush is used by plants, animals and people...



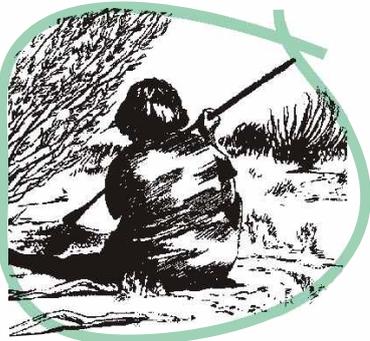
Some types of insects live in galls (woody growths) on the branches and feed off the sap. Others feed and lay their eggs on the leaves. Birds use the Witchetty Bush to nest and forage in. They also eat the insect eggs on the leaves and the sugary scale that some types of insects produce.



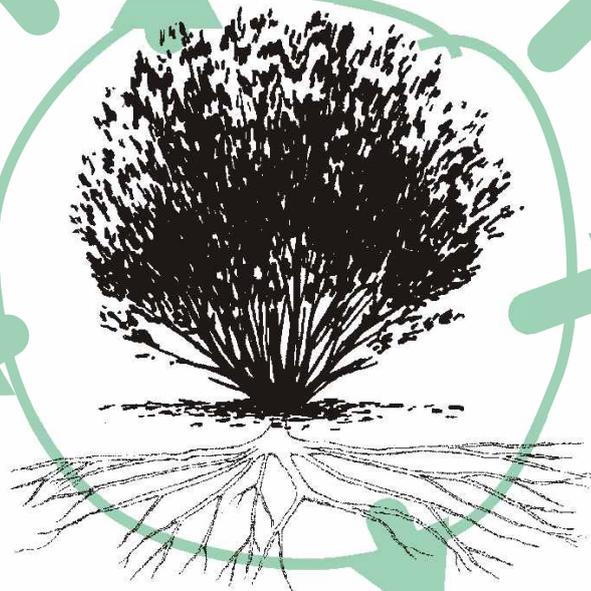
The seeds from the Witchetty Bush have a coloured attachment called an aril. Ants love them, so they collect the whole seed, take it back to the nest, rip off the aril and throw the seed away. This helps the plant to spread its seeds around, so look out for piles of seeds around ant nests!



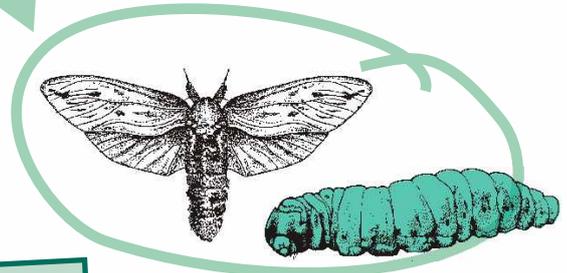
Nectar from the flowers is mainly eaten by insects that help to pollinate the plant.



Aboriginal women and children find Witchetty Grubs by looking for cracks in the soil and digging to the trees roots with a digging stick or crow bar. They find a swollen part of the root where the grubs are feeding, break it off and get the grub out with a piece of hooked grass or their finger. The Witchetty Grubs are eaten raw or cooked quickly in the coals. They taste a bit like egg and have heaps of good fats and energy.



Witchetty Grubs turn into Ghost Moths when they become adults. The adults lay eggs around the Witchetty Bush and when they hatch the grubs burrow into the ground to feed in the roots.



Witchetty Grubs feed on the sap from the roots. They spend most of their lives as grubs, eating, getting fat and gaining enough energy to turn into adult Ghost Moths.

FLOWER POWER

Exchange the number for the matching letter in the alphabet to find out the answer. Eg. 1=A 2=B 26=Z.

The 6 12 15 23 5 18 of a Witchetty Bush is called an

9 14 6 12 15 18 5 19 3 5 14 3 5
and is actually 8 21 14 4 18 5 4 19

of tiny 6 12 15 23 5 18 19 on one stalk.

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