

Plant in Focus, November 2018  
*Dodonaea viscosa* Sticky Hop Bush

*Dodonaea viscosa*, commonly called 'Sticky Hop Bush', is a member of the Sapindaceae family. This family includes *Aesculus* the Horse Chestnuts (in GBG) and *Koelreuteria* Golden Rain Tree (Lost from GBG) (Like the Hop Bush it has a three-lobed seed capsule.) Dodonaeas are known as Hop Bush as they were used in making beer by early European Australians. *Dodonaea viscosa* has also been traditionally used by Aboriginal Australians to treat toothache, cuts and stingray stings.

*Dodonaea viscosa* can be found in every state and territory of Australia. However, it is highly variable and consequently has seven sub-species recognised. These sub-species each have a distinct habitat and can handle varying degrees of drought. The major differences of the sub-species are in distribution, form and leaf characteristics. It is best to plant the sub-species found in the local area, this species will have adapted to these particular environmental conditions.

In general, *Dodonaea viscosa* is an extremely hardy species and is able to resprout from the base. The stand-out horticultural feature of this species is the brilliant colour of the capsules. Other desirable features includes its successful use as a hedge due to the dense habit. There is also a popular non-native form with purple foliage.

*Dodonaea viscosa* flowers are inconspicuous, with no petals. These flowers occur during spring and summer and are less than a centimetre in size. The plants are usually dioecious i.e. the male and female flowers occur on separate plants.

The pollen is wind dispersed. However, fertilisation does not need to occur for the capsules to develop. Fertilised capsules can take up to 11 months to mature with unfertilised capsules maturing faster. Over this time the capsules will change colour from a green or cream colour through to a brilliant red. These winged capsules are only procured on female or bisexual flowers and are approximately 2 cm in size.



*Dodonaea viscosa*

Top: Plant covered with seed capsules.  
Photo: David Eickhoff, flickr.com CC BY 2.0  
Bottom: Capsules have 2, 3 or 4 wings.  
Photo: Forest & Kim Starr, wikipedia.org CC BY 3.0

## Propagation

*Dodonaea viscosa* can be easily propagated from both cuttings and seeds. Cuttings are often preferred to guarantee a female plant with the colourful capsules. The optimum cutting material is young growth that has just firmed. It is best to then use a rooting hormone. Straight perlite may be used as the medium or as a mixture with peat or coconut fibre. If seeds are used for propagation, a treatment of soaking in very hot water prior to sowing will assist germination.

This species prefers well-drained soils and requires a well-lit area. It tolerates part shade, but the capsules will not be as spectacular in colour if shaded. This species can tolerate dry conditions and can also handle some frosts. Little maintenance is necessary. However, regular tip pruning will promote growth and branching. Scale may be an issue due to the viscous leaves. White oil is an effective remedy. Text by Melina McDowell (2007 Botanical Intern)

## Cultivation and uses

*Dodonaea viscosa* can be a relatively fast growing shrub with an ability to pioneer degraded sites. Many of the subspecies are extremely frost and drought tolerant and are also considered a valuable source of pollen by apiculturalists (4).

The wood is very dense, hard and durable (5). This species is killed by fire and caution is recommended when cultivating it due to its potential for weediness (6).

## Name and Taxonomy

The Botanical name origin:

*Dodonaea*: named after a Flemish botanist of the 16th century, Rembert Dodoens.

*viscosa*: from the Latin term viscosus meaning sticky.

## References

1. Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants (ASGAP) (2006) *Dodonaea viscosa* (ASGAP).
2. Australian National Botanical Gardens (ANBG) (2006) Aboriginal Trail. ANBG.
3. Closs, J. (2002) *Dodonea* – The Hop Bush. Australian Plants Online
4. Clemson A (1985) Honey and Pollen Flora. Inkata Press, Melbourne.
5. Cunningham GM, Milthorpe PL, Leigh (1992) Plants of Western New South Wales, Inkata Press.
6. Doran JC, Turnbull JW (eds) 1997) Australian Trees and Shrubs: species for land rehabilitation and farm plant in the tropics. Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, Canberra (ACIASR books online).



*Dodonaea viscosa* Top: Female flowers. Photo: David Eickhoff, flickr.com CC BY 2.0. Bottom: Male flowers.

Photo: J.M.Garg, Wikimedia Commons CC BY 3.0.



*Dodonaea viscosa*  
C21 garden, GBG, Oct 2018. Photo: LP



*Dodonaea viscosa* leaves. Photo: JMK, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 3.0

**Summary**

Family: Sapindaceae

Species: *Dodonaea viscosa*

Common name: Sticky Hop Bush

A *Dodonaea* is also growing near the pump-house for the stormwater dam in Eastern Park.



***Dodonaea viscosa***