

*Acacia pycnantha*

**GOLDEN WATTLE** is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to south-eastern Australia it has small, very fragrant, golden-yellow balls of tiny flowers.

It is also known as *Acacia doré* (French), *Akazie* (German), Australian golden wattle, Broad-leaf wattle, *Goldakazie* (German), Green wattle, and Sydney golden wattle.

Parts of the flower balls attract pollinating birds.

*Pycnantha* is made up of Greek *pycno*- (dense) and *antho*- (flower) components with reference to the dense flowering habit.

Of all the wattles golden wattle is now the official national floral emblem of Australia.

Unofficially it was adopted in this capacity some decades ago. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (in 1909) 1<sup>st</sup> September came to be celebrated as Wattle Day and the Australian Wattle Day League was established. The founding members of this little known group included the then director of the Botanic Gardens in Sydney, Joseph Henry Maiden (1859-1925), and he together with the other founders are commemorated in the names of three acacia species, *Acacia maidenii*, *Acacia clunies-rossiae* and *Acacia kettlewelliae* (not included in text as yet).

In 1954, on her return home to the United Kingdom after her first trip to Australia, Queen Elizabeth sat for a formal portrait at Buckingham Palace (often referred to today as the ‘Wattle Portrait’) which became Australia’s official painting of her. It was painted by Sir William Dargie (1912-2003), the Australian artist especially known for his portraits. Her Majesty is portrayed in it in a yellow dress that had been popular during her trip – and she wears a sprig of wattle on her shoulder. [Apparently the painting now hangs in Parliament House but is familiar all over Australia. Prints of it cannot only be seen in other Australian government offices, in schools and other public buildings but also on Australian naturalization papers.] Golden wattle wreathes the Country’s coat of arms (together with waratah, *Telopea speciosissima*). But it was only on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1988 however that golden wattle gained its formal recognition as a national emblem. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Australian sports men and women had adopted yellow and green for their clothing when representing their Country and these colours are said to be based on this national flower.

Golden wattle has featured on Australian stamps issued on 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1959, 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1964, 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1970 and 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1990.

The flowers, heavy in pollen, are eaten frittered. Golden wattle is also the source of an edible gum often referred to as Australian gum or Wattle gum, that can be chewed or preserved. Adventurous ideas for recipes have been created in recent years including a bread made from roasted, ground golden wattle seed.

Despite awareness that it is often an uneconomic source of tannin in comparison with other species available (it is small and grows slowly) golden wattle’s bark is used for this purpose in Australia and India. In fact some authoritative sources which offer reviews of the uses of plants in south-eastern Asia go so far as to name it as only a source of tannin in that region – notwithstanding other qualities recognized and appreciated in other places.

The flowers yield a yellow dye and a green dye can be obtained from the fruit pods.

The wood is used locally as fuel.

The plant is not only cultivated widely as an ornamental (including in Britain and California) but also as a short-lived windbreak (about 10 years) – and in recognition of its extensive root system it is sometimes grown on sandy embankments in order to prevent their erosion. Like blue-leaved wattle (*Acacia saligna*) however it is viewed with dislike in South Africa as since its introduction there it has become invasive.

In the Mediterranean this is one of the acacias which contributes to the wattle blossom harvested for the perfumery industry.