

Prostanthera lasianthos – Victorian Christmas Bush

Prostanthera lasianthos, commonly known as the Victorian Christmas Bush or Mountain Lilac is an evergreen shrub or small tree growing to some 5m with a spread of up to 3m, although in protected, moist alpine locations it can grow as tall as 10m. It is the largest of the native Mint Bushes and has the widest distribution, occurring naturally from Queensland to Tasmania and eastern South Australia from coastal locations to the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range.

Foliage is attractive in plants growing freely and can be bright-yellow green to darker green, hairless, sometimes shiny, and without blemish. Mountain forms and plants in full sun have slightly leathery foliage. Leaves are up to 15cm long and from 13mm to over 19mm wide, larger than in other *Prostanthera* species. They vary in denseness, taper finely, and the margins are generally toothed, sometimes also waved or curved.

Foliage has an aromatic menthol fragrance. The *Prostanthera* family generically are commonly known as mint bushes.

Masses of thin, soft flowers in wide-angled tapering sprays are the main attraction. The flowers are around 2cm long and are funnel-shaped with spreading lower lobes. In the throat are tiny purple blotches and larger orange ones. In some the flowers are white but others, less commonly, appear pale pink or mauve from a distance.

Prostanthera lasianthos is unaffected by frost in Canberra and will grow in light or stiff soil in sun or shade, but constant wind should be avoided. It is excellent for hiding a fence, as a tall hedge or by a red brick wall. With a good mulch and some watering, it would thrive in city gardens, giving flower when most purple Mint Bushes have finished.

Propagation

Seed requires no pre-treatment.

When to Sow – In warmer areas at any time, in cooler areas where frost is a risk, either in the spring in a greenhouse or after the danger of frost has passed.

How to Sow – Sow in a seed bed or large pot with a sandy loam with a generous quantity of leaf mould. When they are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots or plant out in position. In colder, frost prone areas it may be desirable to grow them on in the greenhouse or a protected position for at least their first winter. Plant them out into their permanent positions in late spring or early summer, after the last expected frosts.