

# Mistletoe

## FACT SHEET

[www.wirraminna.org/drdave-outback/](http://www.wirraminna.org/drdave-outback/)

Outback NSW is home to a surprising number of plant and animal species. Some of these have the same name as European species, but they are completely different.

Mistletoe is one of these species that shares a common name in both Australia and Europe. The European mistletoes are the ones that we kiss a friend under during Christmas, whereas Australian mistletoes are a bush food plant. All mistletoes found in Australia are native.



- Mistletoe is a plant that grows on other plants - it is a parasite.
- Mistletoe have no roots - they get all of their water and minerals from their host (a tree, shrub, grass or other mistletoe).
- Some of the mistletoe species mentioned are the Pale-leafed Mistletoe, the Yellow-flowered Mistletoe, the Fleshy Mistletoe and the Harlequin Mistletoe.'
- There are 91 different species of mistletoe found in Australia - all of them are native.
- Different plants get different kinds of mistletoe. Mistletoes can grow on other mistletoes.
- Most Australian mistletoe berries are edible
- Mistletoe only kills trees if there are too many on one host.
- The dense clumps formed by the mistletoe are ideal nesting or resting spots for birds and small mammals.
- Sometimes mistletoes provide the only available fruit and nectar in an area, especially during dry times.
- Birds disperse both the seeds and pollen of mistletoe.
- Most mistletoe seeds are sticky, so after the bird eats the seed it has to wipe it off on a branch - the seed sticks to the branch and grows on its host.
- Mistletoes have an overall positive effect on biodiversity because they produce litter (fallen leaves) that is rich in nutrients which in turn, provides food and mulch for the tree and food and shelter for many insects.



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## ACTIVITIES

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1. Mistletoes are very complicated. Find out the meanings of these words and what they have to do with mistletoes.

Haustorium:

Hemiparasite:

2. Research what mistletoe species you have in your area?  
(‘Mistletoes of Southern Australia’ by Dr Dave Watson is a great resource on mistletoe)

3. The largest mistletoe in the world is the Western Australian Christmas Tree. Find out about this unusual mistletoe and some of the 91 different Australian species.

4. There are other parasitic plants that are not mistletoe (such as the Northern sandalwood mentioned in the video); find out more about these parasitic plants. Rattle:

Dodder:

Sandalwood:

Native cherry (cherry ballart):

Quandong: