

## Bioactive tea tree FAQ

Rob Waddell, Grand Ridge Propagation, Seaview, Vic

**What are the main species of interest for planting in Gippsland?** *Leptospermum scoparium* (Manuka) grows 3 -5m, flowers Nov/Dec. *Leptospermum polygalifolium ssp polygalifolium* (Jelly Bush) grows 3-7m, flowers Nov/Dec. *Leptospermum continentale* (Prickly tea tree) grows 3-5m, flowers Jan/Feb. *Leptospermum lanigerum* (Woolly tea tree) grows 3-7m, flowers Oct/Nov and tolerates very boggy conditions. Additional species will be assessed and tested for suitability over time. Note: there is considerable genetic variation for flowering time within species.

**How long until the plants will flower?** The above species will flower well within 3 or 4 years from planting, although this can vary due to site conditions.

**What planting densities are required?** This varies depending on site conditions, rainfall and your end goal. A few starting points are:

Windbreak (tea tree only): plant 2m apart

Windbreak (mixed with Eucalypts etc): plant 3m apart

Grazing sheep under plantation or slashing grass: 5m to 6m apart or 400 to 300 per hectare

Complete plant out of site, no grazing: 2m to 3m apart or 2500 to 1150 per hectare

**What honey yields can be expected?** Yields achieved in New Zealand have been as high as 40kg per hive, with stocking rates varying from 1 to 4 hives per hectare depending on the site plant density, weather conditions, strength of the hives and age/size of the plantation. In order to get the highest possible bioactivity in the honey, the tea trees need to be the major source of nectar for the bees. Other sources of nectar foraged by the bees (eucalypts, pasture species, weeds etc) will reduce the overall bioactivity of the honey produced. The honey takes 12 to 18 months to reach peak bioactivity and must be stored correctly for this period before testing. Heating the honey can reduce the bioactivity! The honey from tea tree is "stickier" than other honeys and is more difficult to extract. This could have implications for flow hives.

**Other considerations?** Shading of the tea trees under a tree canopy will reduce flowering and potential nectar yield. Site aspects with more sun exposure will have higher flower production. Select a species which will thrive in your locality. Tea trees are very adaptable shrubs, but may not suit all soil types and have different tolerances of waterlogging, coastal exposure etc.... a small test planting could be worthwhile initially to test suitability if you have concerns.

**Further questions?** Contact Rob Waddell, Grand Ridge Propagation, Seaview, Vic

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