Macadamias belong to the Proteaceae family, a line of ancient flowering plants that arose when Australia was still part of Gondwana, 90-100 million years ago. Other well-known members of Proteaceae include Banksia, Grevillea and Hakea.

There are four Macadamia species, all are native to Australia and all are threatened in the wild.

### Where to Look for Macadamias

Macadamias naturally occur in the coastal subtropical rainforests of north-east New South Wales and south-east Queensland, with a tiny outlier population in central Queensland.

Extensive clearing has caused the large-scale loss of wild macadamia, with many populations now scattered in fragmented rainforest remnants on public and private land.

Fortunately, the highly desired, edible nut produced by two types (species) of macadamia, meant that some of these macadamias were left standing when the rainforest around them was cleared.

The delicious nuts also led to planting of macadamias well outside their natural distribution, and they can now be found in urban backyards, bush blocks, old orchards, parks and reserves across Australia and overseas.

In the wild (below), macadamias can be difficult to pick out amongst the other rainforest trees. They can also look different from cultivated trees, are often multi-stemmed (below right) and produce far fewer flowers and nuts than cultivated trees.

### Identifying Features of Macadamias

There are four species of macadamia:

1. Queensland Nut (*Macadamia integrifolia*);
2. Rough-shelled Macadamia (*M. tetraphylla*);
3. Gympie Nut (*M. ternifolia*); and
4. Bulberin Nut (*M. jansenii*).

The first three listed above have overlapping distributions and can be found in the same habitats; by comparison, Bulberin Nut is found only in a small area of central Queensland.

Key features for distinguishing macadamias are:

- Leaf shape and size;
- Leaf edge and tips;
- Flower colour; and
- Nut size and shell.

The table overleaf compares these features for each macadamia species.
**Common Name**

Queensland Nut

Scientific Name

*Macadamia integrifolia*

**Status**

Vulnerable

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**Rough-shelled Macadamia**

*Macadamia tetraphylla*

**Status**

Vulnerable

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**Gympie Nut**

*Macadamia ternifolia*

**Status**

Endangered

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**Bulberin Nut**

*Macadamia jansenii*

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**LEAVES**

**Leaves per node**

- Queensland Nut: usually 3 (may be 2 or 4)
- Rough-shelled Macadamia: usually 4 (can be 3 or 5)
- Gympie Nut: usually 3
- Bulberin Nut: usually 3

**Leaf tips**

- Queensland Nut: rounded or pointed
- Rough-shelled Macadamia: abruptly rounded with stiff point
- Gympie Nut: pointed
- Bulberin Nut: pointed

**Leaf edges**

- Queensland Nut: smooth, wavy (mature trees); coarsely serrated (juvenile trees)
- Rough-shelled Macadamia: densely serrated
- Gympie Nut: moderately serrated
- Bulberin Nut: smooth, wavy

**New flush colour**

- Queensland Nut: light green
- Rough-shelled Macadamia: red to pink
- Gympie Nut: pink / pinkish-red
- Bulberin Nut: green or pink

**FLOWERS**

**Colour**

- Queensland Nut: cream
- Rough-shelled Macadamia: pinkish-purple
- Gympie Nut: pinkish or cream
- Bulberin Nut: cream-brown

**NUTS**

**Shells**

- Queensland Nut: thick, hard, smooth
- Rough-shelled Macadamia: thick, hard, bumpy
- Gympie Nut: thin, hard, smooth
- Bulberin Nut: thin, hard, smooth

**Edibility**

- Queensland Nut: edible
- Rough-shelled Macadamia: edible
- Gympie Nut: inedible / very bitter
- Bulberin Nut: inedible / slightly bitter

**Size**

- Queensland Nut: x 0.2 - 0.5
- Rough-shelled Macadamia: x 0.2 - 0.5
- Gympie Nut: x 0.2 - 0.3
- Bulberin Nut: x 0.2 - 0.5

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For more information

- [www.wildmacadamias.org.au](http://www.wildmacadamias.org.au)

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**References**

