

# Mickey Mouse Plant *Ochna serrulata*



*Ochna serrulata*, Mickey Mouse Plant, is a southern African shrub (South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland) with bright yellow flowers, bright red calyces and green fruit that turns shiny black as it matures. The name, Mickey Mouse Plant, relates to the red sepals and rounded glossy black fruits that have some semblance to Mickey's red shorts and rounded black ears. In South Africa, it's enjoyed as a garden plant, and Giles Mbambezeli and Alice Notten from South Africa's Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden wrote in its praise: *This is certainly a shrub that every gardener should have in their garden, not only because of its beautiful yellow flowers, but also because of its attractive fruits.* These days, in Australia, it doesn't enjoy the same popularity!



Mickey Mouse Bush occurs naturally in many habitats in South Africa, from grasslands to rocky hill slopes, from the margins and interiors of evergreen forests from sea level up to 1,800 m. This ability to survive in a wide range of environments has obviously assisted it to become naturalised in many countries

of the world, including Australia. Flowers are pollinated by bees and butterflies, and the small black fruit are irresistible to many birds and animals, further facilitating dispersal.



*Ochna serrulata* was introduced into Australia as a garden plant in the early 1900s and was a common sight in Sydney, often doing particularly well in neglected gardens. The plants are hardy and not only are the seeds readily bird

dispersed into natural bushland, but the plants are can resprout after being cut down or sprayed with chemicals. In south-eastern Queensland, *Ochna serrulata* is one of the 25 most significant invasive plants, readily establishing in both undisturbed and disturbed bushland, and in some case, dense populations can inhibit the growth of native understory plants. In addition to Queensland, it is naturalised in New South Wales, including Lord



*Ochna serrulata* – flowers. Photo: Forest & Kim Starr, CC BY 3.0  
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Howe Island, Norfolk Island, possibly Darwin and is cultivated in Melbourne. Sale, commercial propagation and distribution are prohibited in New Zealand where it is listed on the *National Pest Plant Accord*. The take home message is, don't grow *Ochna serrulata* in your garden, no matter how attractive or how entertaining you may find it.



Green P S. 2024. *Ochna serrulata*. In Barrett R L, Kodala P G (ed.) Flora of Australia.

<https://profiles.ala.org.au/opus/foa/profile/Ochna%20serrulata>

Mbambezeli G, Notten A. 2002. PlantZAfrica, South African National Biodiversity Institute: [Ochna serrulata](#) | [PlantZAfrica](#)

New South Wales Weed Wise, NSW Department of Primary Industries. 2022. Ochna (*Ochna serrulata*) <https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/Weeds/Ochna>

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ochna\\_serrulata](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ochna_serrulata)

Distribution Map for *Ochna serrulata* - modified from Plants of the World Online. 2024. Facilitated by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. <https://powo.science.kew.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:606778-1>

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