**Papaver somniferum**

**Scientific Name**

*Papaver somniferum* L.

**Synonyms**

*Papaver album* Mill.
*Papaver setigerum* DC.
*Papaver somniferum* L. subsp. *setigerum* (DC.) Corb
*Papaver somniferum* L. subsp. *somniferum*
*Papaver somniferum* L. var. *setigerum* (DC.) Elkan
*Papaver somniferum* L. var. *somniferum*

**Family**

Papaveraceae

**Common Names**

oil poppy, oil seed poppy, opium poppy, poppy, small opium poppy, small-flower opium poppy, small-flowered opium poppy, wild poppy

**Origin**

Native to northern Africa (i.e. northern Algeria, northern Libya, Morocco and Tunisia), the Azores, the Madeira Islands, the Canary Islands, southern Europe (i.e. Greece, Italy, France, Portugal and Spain) and Cyprus.

**Naturalised Distribution**

Opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) is widely naturalised in southern Australia and is most common and widespread in New South Wales, the ACT, Tasmania and south-eastern South Australia. It is also relatively common in south-western Western Australia and occasionally naturalised in southern Queensland, the southern parts of the Northern Territory and other parts of South Australia. Also naturalised on Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island.

**Note:** Opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum* subsp. *somniferum*) and small-flowered opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum* subsp. *setigerum*) are recognised as separate entities in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania, but not elsewhere in Australia. Both sub-species are naturalised in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania, but only small-flowered opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum* subsp. *setigerum*) is thought to be present in Western Australia. In general, small-flowered opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum* subsp. *setigerum*) is more widespread and common than opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum* subsp. *somniferum*) in Australia. The two sub-species can be distinguished by the following differences:

- opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum* subsp. *somniferum*) has very few, if any, bristly hairs on its stems and leaves. Its fruit are relatively large (about 5 cm across) and almost rounded in shape (i.e. globose).
- small-flowered opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum* subsp. *setigerum*) has stems and leaves that are covered in bristly hairs. Its fruit are relatively small (about 2 cm across) and slightly elongated in shape (i.e. cylindrical or sub-globose).

In addition, cultivars of opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) with double flowers of a variety of colours are sometimes cultivated as garden ornamentals in Australia. These double-flowered plants are generally called peony poppies (*Papaver somniferum* var. *paeoniflorum* or *Papaver paeoniflorum*).

**Notes**

Opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) is regarded as an environmental weed in Victoria, the ACT and Tasmania. As well as being a weed of crops and disturbed sites, this species invades natural habitats. It is regarded as a common environmental weed in north-western Tasmania and grows in herbfields and grasslands in Western Australia.

Opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) has also been recorded in conservation areas in Victoria (i.e. Barkindji Biosphere Reserve), South Australia (i.e. Belair National Park, ...
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young Papaver somniferum subsp. setigerum plant (Photo Sheldon Navie)