

Eucalyptus camaldulensis

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The **River Red Gum** (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) is a tree of the genus *Eucalyptus*. It is one of around 800 in the genus. It is a plantation species in many parts of the world, but is native to [Australia](#), where it is widespread, especially beside inland water courses. Oddly, it is named for a private estate garden near the Camaldoli monastery near Naples ([L'Hortus Camaldulensis di Napoli](#)), from where the first specimen came to be described. Material from this tree was used by Frederick Dehnhardt, Chief Gardener at the Botanic Gardens in Naples, to describe this species in 1832.^{[\[1\]](#)}

It is a familiar and iconic tree seen along many watercourses right across inland Australia. The tree produces welcome shade in the extreme temperatures of central Australia, and plays an important role in stabilising river banks.

Description



Trunk and bark detail

The tree can grow to 45 metres tall; it has smooth bark, ranging in colour from white and grey to red-brown, which is shed in long ribbons.^[2] The tree has a large, dense crown of leaves. The base of the bole can be covered with rough, reddish-brown bark.^[3] The juvenile and adult leaves are stalked, with the adult leaves broad at the base, tapering to the tip. The adult leaf colour is a dull blue-green. The leaf also contains several to many oil-producing glands in the un-veined areas of the leaf.^[4] It is fast growing, and usually grows to 40 to 45 meters in height, depending on its location.^{[5][6]} The tree grows straight under favourable conditions, but can develop twisted branches in drier conditions.^[3]

River Reds and many other eucalypts have an ominous nickname, "Widow Maker", as they have a habit of dropping large boughs (often half the diameter of the trunk) without warning.^[7] This form of [self-pruning](#) may be a means of saving water or simply a result of their brittle wood. This is also an efficient way of attracting wildlife that live in the holes formed, which gives the red gum a source of natural fertiliser^[citation needed].

Taxonomy

The tree is classed as an angiosperm, or flowering plant, placing it in the phylum Anthophyta. *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* consists of two variations and one subspecies: *E. camaldulensis* var. *camaldulensis*, and *E. camaldulensis* var. *obtusa*. The subspecies *Eucalyptus simulata*, found in North Queensland, has been recognised as a hybrid of var. *obtusa* and *Eucalyptus tereticornis*.^[8]

Distribution



The dry river beds of central Australia have sufficient underground water flow to sustain the trees.

E. camaldulensis is commonly found along many waterways within Australia, being the widest natural distribution of any eucalyptus species. The species is inextricably linked to watercourses. In fact, in only a few locations in

Australia will the species occur away from water courses.^[6] *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* var. *camaldulensis* is found in the Murray-Darling catchment area, whereas *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* var. *obtusa* is found outside the Murray-Darling catchment.

Ecology

The species can be found along the banks of watercourses, as well as the floodplains of those watercourses. Due to the proximity to these watercourses, River Red Gum is subject to regular flooding in its natural habitat. River Red Gum prefers soils with clay content. The trees rely on not just on rainfall but also on regular flooding as well, since flooding recharges the sub-soil with water.^[9]

The association of the River Red Gum with water makes the tree a natural habitat choice, indeed sometimes the only choice in drier areas, for other species. The trees provide a breeding habitat for fish during the flooding season, which also benefits aquatic bird life that depend on fish as a food source during their own breeding season. Wilson,^[6] who examined the management of River Red Gums in NSW, suggests shelter is provided for fish in rivers and streams by fallen branches from the River Red Gum. The "snags" formed when River Red Gums fall into rivers such as the Glenelg, are an important part of river ecosystems, and vital habitat and breeding sites for native fish like [River Blackfish](#). Unfortunately most snags have been removed from these rivers, beginning in the 1850s, due to river-improvement strategies designed to prevent hazards to navigation, reduce damage to in-stream structures, rejuvenate or scour channels, and increase hydraulic capacity to reduce flooding.^[10] However, the Murray–Darling Basin Commission has recognised the importance of snags as aquatic habitat, and a moratorium on their removal from the Murray River has been recommended.^[11]

Hollows start to form at around 120–180 years of age, creating habitat for many wildlife species, including a range of breeding and roosting animals such as bats, carpet pythons, and birds.^[6] The dense foliage of the tree also provides shade and shelter from the sun in drier areas.

The **Superb Parrot**, a **threatened species**, is amongst the bird species which nest in the River Red Gum.^[12]

River Red Gums contributes to the provision of nutrients and energy for other species through its leaf fall, as well as insect fall from its branches. This is especially important to the ecology in areas of low nutrients.^[6] The tree's preferred habitat of the floodplain and watercourses also gives the tree the role of a flood mitigator, as well as slowing silt runoff.

Cultivation

E. camaldulensis readily germinates from both fresh seed and seed stored in cool dry conditions. It quickly toughens up and can withstand drought even whilst in forestry tubes. It makes an excellent bonsai and will readily regrow both from the base and from epicormic buds.

Uses



Bark on trunk



polished red gum table

Red gum is so named for its brilliant red wood, which can range from a light pink through to almost black, depending on the age and weathering. It is somewhat brittle and is often cross-grained, making hand working difficult. Traditionally used in rot resistant applications like stumps, fence posts and

sleepers, more recently it has been recognised in craft furniture for its spectacular deep red colour and typical fiddleback figure. It needs careful selection, as it tends to be quite reactive to changes in humidity (moves about a lot in service). It is quite hard, dense (about 900 kg/m³), can take a fine polish and carves well. It is a popular timber for wood turners, particularly if old and well-seasoned.

It is also popular for use as firewood. Significant amounts of Victoria and NSW's firewood comes from Red Gums in the [Barmah](#) forest.

The wood makes fine charcoal, and is successfully used in Brazil for iron and steel production. In addition, this plant is used for [beekeeping](#) in Brazil and Australia. Recently, it had been use to produce Decks (Patagonian cherry) and wooden Floors (Andean cherry).

It is one of the most widely planted eucalypts in the world (ca 5,000 km² planted) (NAS, 1980a).