

# Coachwood - *Ceratopetalum apetalum*

*Ceratopetalum* is a genus of nine species of shrub and tree in the family [Cunoniaceae](#). They are found along the eastern coast of Australia and extend north to New Guinea and adjoining islands.

- [Ceratopetalum apetalum](#) - Coachwood
- [Ceratopetalum corymbosum](#) - Sycamore
- [Ceratopetalum gummiferum](#) - NSW Christmas Bush
- [Ceratopetalum hylandii](#)
- [Ceratopetalum iugumensis](#)
- [Ceratopetalum macrophyllum](#)
- [Ceratopetalum succirubrum](#) - Satin Sycamore, blood-in-the-bark, or North Queensland Coachwood
- [Ceratopetalum tetrapterum](#)
- [Ceratopetalum virchowii](#) - Pink Sycamore; Sycamore, Pink; Dogwood



Regrowth Coachwood in Nymboi-Binderay National Park, formerly Wild Cattle Creek State Forest

Its range extends into southern Queensland, where is often found on poorer quality soils in gullies and creeks and often occurs in almost pure stands (as can be seen on Moonpar Forest Drive, Moonpar State Forest to the north west of Dorrigo).

It is a medium-sized hardwood tree, straight-growing with smooth, fragrant, greyish bark. George Caley first collected the species and it was described by David Don in 1830.

Other common names for *Ceratopetalum apetalum* are Scented Satinwood, Tarwood, Bosisto's Box, and Gippsland Green Box.

This species, as the name suggests, was highly sought after for the frames for coaches, railway carriages and aircraft. Aluminum framing replaced it for these uses. It provided the frames for the Mosquito Bomber in WW2 and the rifle stocks of many 303. If you have or used a rifle made at the former Lithgow Small Arms Factory, it was a Coachwood rifle stock.

The majority of the Coachwood logged for the war effort was supplied from Wild Cattle Creek State Forest and Moonpar State Forest and milled at the former Briggsvale Sawmill and Cascade Sawmill or one of the former sawmills located on the Coffs Harbour Jetty Foreshores (where the Sunday Market car parking is currently). The most southern location I am aware of is at Bolaro Mountain (Bolaro State Forest) due west of Batemans Bay. There could be isolated patches further south.

## Description

Coachwood usually grows to a height of 25 meters (occasionally up to 40meters), with a trunk diameter of 90cm. The stem has distinctive horizontal marks, or scars, which often encircle the trunk. Larger trees have short buttresses.

The heartwood is attractive with a colour ranging from pale pink to pinkish-brown. The sapwood is not always distinguishable. The grain is straight, finely textured and even. On the tangential face the wood is often highly figured. The wood has a characteristic caramel odour.

Flowers from spring to summer, with a mass of white flowers, followed by red fruits that attract the colourful king parrot.

It can flower heavily and forms an attractive backdrop on the Illawarra escarpment, south of Sydney



## Uses and Timber Properties



The timber is light and easily worked. It is used for flooring, furniture and cabinetwork, interior fittings, turnery, gun stocks, wood carving, veneers as well as spars and masts for boats. Courtroom number three of The High Court of Australia is completely furnished with coachwood timber. Coachwood's heartwood, not always distinguishable from the sapwood. The sapwood is susceptible to lyctid borer attack.

Coachwood is only moderately durable and is not resistant to termites. The sapwood (but not heartwood) of this species is readily impregnated with preservatives.

The timber machines well to a smooth surface. It accepts standard fixings and fastenings but tends to split when nailing (pre-drilling is recommended). Coachwood is unsuitable for steam bending. Coachwood glues well and readily accepts most coatings. Coachwood responds better to water- and spirit-based stains, than to oil-based equivalents.

Density at 12% moisture content is 625kg/m<sup>3</sup>. Shrinkage is 8.1% tangential and 4.0% radial. Seasons well, some risk of internal checking; collapse is slight, so reconditioning is unnecessary.