

Crabapple - *Schizomeria ovata*



It is also known as; Australian white birch, white cherry, snowberry, humbug, and squeaker

Schizomeria ovata, a medium to large Australian rainforest tree, is widespread in coastal temperate rainforest from Narooma in Southern New South Wales north to Mackay, Queensland. It is also found in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

Schizomeria is a genus with 10 species of plants in the family Cunoniaceae. There are two species in Australia. Others occur in New Guinea, the Moluccas and the Solomon Islands. The Cunoniaceae evolved in Gondwanaland and members of the family can be found in all landmasses that formed Gondwanaland. Members of the family have spread north of the Wallace Line and now can be found on the Malaysian Peninsula.

Schizomeria is from the Greek, meaning “*I cut a portion of*”, referring to the petals which appear as if parts have been cut from the petal tips. *Ovata* comes from the Latin word for egg (ovum), thus egg shape.

The heartwood is variable in colour, from off-white to pale brown, often with pinkish or purplish streaks. Overall the timber is pale blond, and is sold under the name Australian white birch.

The sapwood is not distinctive in colour and can be up to 150mm wide. The texture is fine and even, and the grain can be variable. When wet it has a density of 980kg/m³ and dries to a density of 640kg/m³. Janka hardness rating for green is 3.8 and dry 4.5 thus a soft timber.

The timber is relatively easy to dry except for the dark heart material and collapse is slight. Whilst drying shrinkage of 3% radial and 6.5% tangential will occur. Boric treatment is required to prevent blue stain and insect issues.

It is easy to work, glues well and easy to impregnate with preservatives. However is not suitable for external work. Its uses include; plywood, furniture, turning and internal joinery.

The timber was notably used as an interior finish in the Sydney Opera House. Plywood veneered with Crabapple was used for the ceiling, upper walls, and seating of the Concert Hall, and for wall and ceiling panelling and doors in other internal areas. The Crabapple veneer had been specially dyed to meet the Opera House specifications at the Veneer and Plywood Pty Ltd. plant at Yarras in the Hastings valley and was given the commercial name of 'Cinnamon birch', a warm 'cinnamon' color. The Yarras mill no longer exists.

For a refurbishment in 2018 selected Australian White Birch veneer was manufactured into moulded ply theatre seating by Emtex Furniture Brisbane. A white wash finish matching the original approved by the Opera House Trust was applied.