

Eucalyptus viminalis



Common names include Manna Gum, White Gum or Ribbon Gum, however it is also known as vim and viminalis. It is one of two eucalypts known by the species name. The other is *fastigata* and interesting their distribution has significant overlap.

It is endemic to south-eastern Australia and Tasmania. It is widely distributed from Kangaroo Island to the Queensland border with NSW. It is thought by many to be the eucalypt with the second largest distribution behind River Red Gum.

The Aboriginal tribe of Wurun Djeri, from the Melbourne region, takes their name from their word *wurun* meaning Manna Gum which is common along the Yarra River (*Birrarung*), and *djeri*, a grub found in the tree.

The Manna Gum was so named by Europeans after the *manna* the ancient Hebrews collected in the wilderness (Exodus 16), because it produces a sweet, white edible gum.

Description

It grows to a height of 50m, sometimes to 90m in higher rainfall areas. Crown spreads over 15 meters. It forms a lignotuber and often deep rooted. It has smooth, often powdery, white to pale brown bark that is shed in long ribbons, sometimes hanging on the upper branches, and sometimes with rough, fibrous bark on the lower trunk.

Young plants and coppice regrowth have sessile, lance-shaped to curved or oblong leaves 25–150mm long, 5–35mm wide and arranged in opposite pairs. Adult leaves are arranged alternately, the same shade of green on both sides, lance-shaped to curved, 85–232mm long and 8–30mm wide, tapering to a petiole 10–25mm long.



The flower buds are arranged in groups of three or seven on an unbranched peduncle 4–10mm long, the individual buds sessile or on pedicels up to 5mm long. Mature buds are oval to spindle-shaped, 5–9mm long and 3–6mm wide with a conical, rounded or beaked operculum. Flowering occurs from December to May and the flowers are white. The fruit is a woody, cup-shaped or hemispherical capsule 3–8mm long and 5–9mm wide with the valves prominently protruding.

Frost resistant and coppices well from the stump.

Taxonomy and naming

Eucalyptus viminalis was first formally described in 1806 by Jacques Labillardière in his book *Novae Hollandiae Plantarum Specimen*. *Viminalis* – is Latin for “vimen” a word meaning “bearing shoots or ribbons (osiers/pliant twigs) for wicker work”.



Adult leaves and buds

Ad



Mature fruits

M

There are 4 subspecies and they are;

- *Eucalyptus viminalis* subsp. *cygnetensis* is a spreading tree to 20m with rough bark on the lower half of the trunk, and flower buds usually in groups of seven. Commonly known as the rough-barked manna gum, grows in the higher rainfall areas of South Australia, including Kangaroo Island and the southern Mount Lofty Ranges and as far east as the Grampians in Victoria.
- *Eucalyptus viminalis* subsp. *hentyensis* has little rough bark, coarse, broad juvenile leaves and flower buds in groups of three or seven. Commonly known as the western Tasmanian sand gum, grows in sandy soil on the west coast of Tasmania, north from Strahan.
- *Eucalyptus viminalis* subsp. *pryoriana* previously known as *Eucalyptus pryoriana* is a spreading tree to 15m tall, with rough bark and flower buds in groups of three. Commonly known as the Gippsland manna gum, grows in sandy, coastal soil in the Gippsland and adjoining areas.
- *Eucalyptus viminalis* subsp. *siliceana* is a shady tree to 15m tall with rough bark on the trunk, flower buds in groups of three and seven, fruit 4–6mm wide and glaucous tip on the seedlings. It is known only from the Wail State Forest in the Wimmera region of Victoria, where it grows in deep sand.¹

Timber Properties

Heartwood pale pink or pale pinkish brown. The sapwood is but not visually distinct. The wood texture is medium and even.

The heartwood of the species is a pale pink or pinkish-brown colour, often with distinctive light grey streaks. Sapwood, up to 35mm wide, is not clearly distinguishable from the true wood. The texture of manna gum timber is medium and even with a variable grain and prominent growth rings. It is usually quarter-sawn.

Green density is 1100kg/m³ and air dry density reduces to 750kg/m³. Difficult to dry and is prone to internal honeycombing, surface checking and collapse during seasoning.

Shrinkage 6% radial and 12% tangential, after recondition this reduces to 3% radial and 6% tangential.

Not difficult to work and glues satisfactorily and pre-drilling is recommended for nailing near the end of the boards.



Sapwood is susceptible to lyctid borers and not durable in exposed positions.

Uses

Aborigines used the wood of the tree to make shields and wooden bowls.

It has limited commercial availability. It is suitable for applications such as flooring, joinery, paneling, furniture and general construction. It rotary peels well unfortunately drying problems causes issues.

Widely grown in southern Europe and countries in Africa where flooding occurs during warmer climates. The trees deep roots drain much of the excess water which reduces the mosquito populations, thus helps to combat the spread of malaria. It is also grown overseas for honey production.

The sugar in the manna gum is comprised of unfermentable sugar called Eucalin and a fermentable sugar, supposed to be Dextroglucose.

Individually Dr L. Wayne Braithwaite (CSIRO leading Zoologist/Ecologist) and Professor Ian Hume (Sydney University) informed me in the mid 1990's if you planted a corridor of *Viminalis* with ivy under storey koalas would be well looked after. *Viminalis* because it is a favourite food tree and natural occurring in 4 states and ACT. Ivy to prevent the development of a dense under storey. Koalas do not like a dense under storey as they are most vulnerable when on the ground and predators can hide in the dense under storey.

A number of Professor Hume's PhD students undertook research in the Nowendoc area between Thunderbolts Way and Brackendale Road and Riamuka Satet Forests. Not in the State Forests but on private land. Dr Braithwaite considers this area to have the highest concentration of koalas. The private land is a woodland on basalt soils with a grassy under storey. Many a survey found considerably lower density of koalas in the adjoining tall forests.

Of interest, in the 1990's the area had an albino koala.