

Illawarra Flame Tree

Brachychiton acerifolius

The timber no longer has any commercial use. However its flowers, leaves and seed pods have inspired many a wood turner and wood sculptor.

Prior to the invention/production of modern sound proofing material the timber was used to sound proof recording studios and other rooms requiring sound proofing.

Illawarra flame tree, is a large tree of the family Malvaceae, native to sheltered temperate and subtropical regions on the east coast of Australia. It is famous for the bright red bell-shaped flowers that often cover the whole tree when it is leafless.

Along with other members of the genus *Brachychiton*, it is commonly referred to as a Kurrajong and/or bottle trees. There are 31 species of the genus *Brachychiton*, of which 30 are native to Australia and one is native to New Guinea. Mistakenly, the Baobab Trees of the Kimberley were once placed in this genus. The Baobab Tree is from the genus *Adansonia*. The 8 species of this genus are native of Madagascar. It is a point of argument that the Baobab trees along with the domestic cat were introduced some 600 years ago by Madagascan trepang fishermen.

Fossils from New South Wales and New Zealand are estimated to be 50 million years old, corresponding to the Paleogene era.



Distribution

Brachychiton acerifolius is found in coastal rainforests from Milton on the south coast of New South Wales to far north Queensland.

Taxonomy

Brachychiton acerifolius was first described in 1855 by W. Macarthur and C. Moore. The name *Brachychiton* is derived from the Greek *brachys*, meaning short, and *chiton*, a type of tunic, as a reference to the coating on the seed. The specific epithet *acerifolius* suggests the appearance of the foliage is similar to that of the genus *Acer*, the maples.



Kurrajong comes from the Dharuk Aboriginal language word *garrajun* meaning - fishing line. Fishing lines were made from kurrajong bark. The Dharuk people lived on the Cumberland plan area of the Sydney basin. They occupied an area of approximately 6,000 square kms.

The Dharug language, now largely extinct, is generally considered one of two dialects, the other being the language spoken by the neighbouring Eora, constituting a single language. The Era

people occupied the coastal areas around Port Jackson and had first contact with European settlers.

Description

It is tolerant of temperate climates and is now cultivated world-over for its beauty. However, the maximum height of 40 meters is reached only in the original, warmer, habitat. It usually grows to be about 20 meters.



All members of this genus are monoecious with separate male and female flowers on the same plant. The flowers have a bell-shaped perianth consisting of a single series of fused lobes which is regarded as a calyx. The female flowers have five separate carpels that can each form a woody fruit containing several seeds. The flower colour can be variable but mainly shades of red. The Illawarra Flame Tree drops its foliage before flowering.

The Illawarra Flame Tree is known to bloom erratically in the wild and in cultivation. A beautiful example is on the Coramba Road near the former Total Gardens Nursery. It is growing with a Jacaranda and a Bougainvillea. These three plants often bloom at the same time giving a magnificent floral display.

The pod-like fruits are dark brown, wide, boat-shaped and about 10cm long. They contain masses of thin bristles that stick in the skin of humans, as well as yellow seeds. The seeds are nutritious and are traditionally eaten by Aborigines after toasting.

