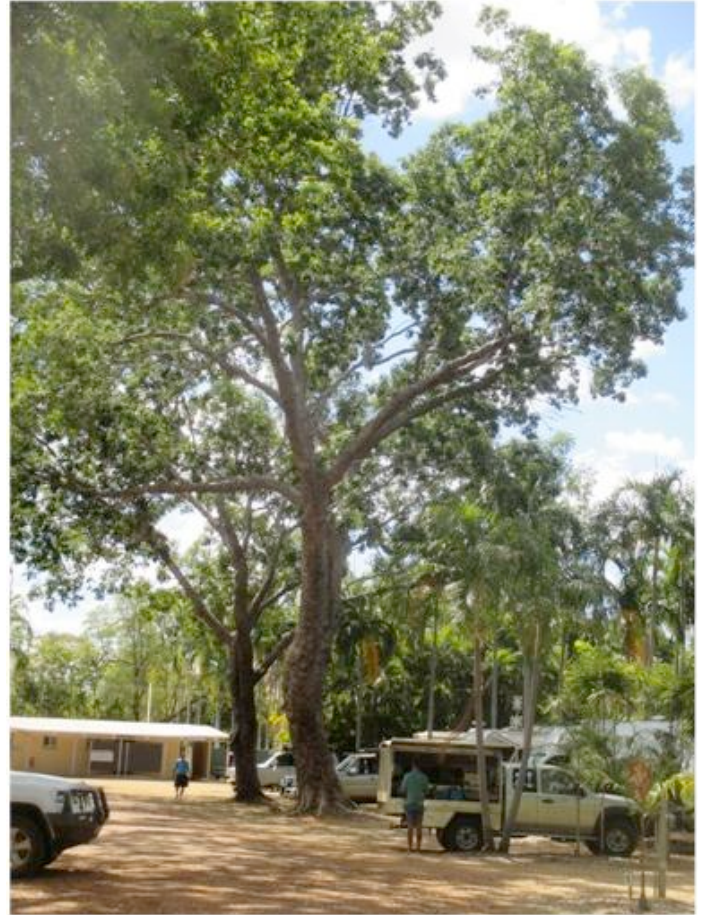


# African Mahogany

*Khaya senegalensis*

I am sure that any who have visited the "Top End" of the Northern Territory will have seen the majestic African Mahoganies growing in the towns north of Mataranka, especially in Caravan Parks. Earlier this year on a caravan holiday I was taken by these trees, however not all of the local people enjoyed them, as they generate new plants profusely and are supposedly like our River Red Gums, i.e. liable to drop branches without warning.

They were called mahogany because of the similarity of the wood to the famed South American varieties. There are about six species of *Khaya* exported as African Mahogany and they often get their name from the port from which



*round fruit & winged seeds*

commonly known as Dry Zone Mahogany, as many of the other species are from rain forest areas. *Khaya* is a West African vernacular name for the tree, while *senegalensis* refers to the country Senegal.

The tree naturally grows in deciduous

they are exported. The species commonly grown in the Northern Territory – and in north Queensland is *Khaya senegalensis*. This is



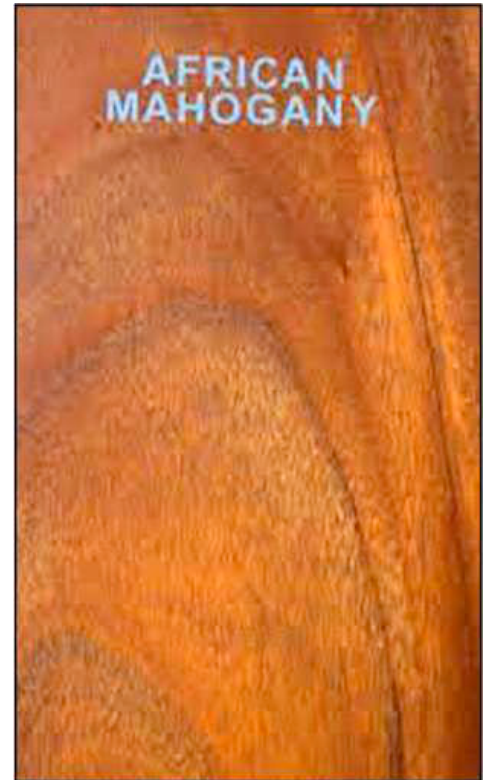
*pinnate leaf*

savannah forests similar to those found in northern Australia. It is a tall erect tree growing up to 24 metres with a clear bole of 6 metres or less frequently dividing into three or four large ascending limbs which provides good shade, making them popular trees in parks. The leaves are leathery, large and pinnate with up to 7 pairs of leaflets. The flowers are small and sweet scented while the mature fruits are spherical and grow to the size of golf balls or larger. The fruit divide into four sections and contain many winged seeds which remain viable for some time.

The timber varies considerably in colour, from pale pink brown when cut and darkening with exposure to a deep red brown. The sapwood varies little from the heartwood. In texture it closely resembles the Central and South American Mahoganies (*Swietenia species*). It is moderately hard and heavy with an air dried weight of about 750 Kg per cubic metre (cf. Jarrah at 830 kg/ cub m). It is the hardest of the African Mahoganies and is harder than the South American Mahoganies. The wood in young trees is pale compared with mature trees. The figure and colour of the wood from crotches is very striking and rich in colour.

In texture and figure it more closely resembles the Central and South American Mahoganies than other African species. The wood is resistant to rot and said to be termite resistant, however at the Douglas Daly Caravan Park I saw a pile of cut wood on the ground which had been destroyed by termites- much to my

disappointment. *Khaya senegalensis* is said to provide the best surface finishing properties of all of the African species.



African Mahoganies have been planted for over 50 years in the Northern Territory, and even though some see them as feral plants, plantations are being developed. On the road out to Douglas Daly Park, about 150 km north of Katherine and some distance west of the Stuart Highway are several plantations of young African Mahoganies. Many of these plantations are undergoing their first thinning. There is some thought that the thinnings may be a resource for pulping in the Northern Territory.

The African Mahoganies are important timbers for furniture, carving, indoor decoration, veneer, staircases, panelling and flooring. The harder dry zone Mahogany is commonly used in Africa for construction purposes. It is an excellent turning timber.





*one of many plantations of young Mahoganies*



*bark*

## **References**

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