

Trees 'n' Timber



Ron Allen

Black Box

Eucalyptus largiflorens

Last weekend saw the Riverland Woodworkers host the Merry Month of May event. It was a great weekend and they deserve praise for their efforts. More-so they are to be congratulated on the work they have done in restoring their current clubrooms, former Tech Studies workshops, but not used for the past 20 years or so except as an animal shelter. I thought that I would continue with the Riverland theme and therefore chose a tree of the region, Black Box, for this article.

Derivation of names

Eucalyptus – as mentioned in the past, from Greek 'eu', and 'kalyptos' meaning well covered and referring to the cap (operculum) which covers and protects the bud.

largiflorens – from Latin *largus* – meaning abundant and *florens* – blooming, referring to the flowers, although it is a little misleading as the flowers are small and inconspicuous.

The common name refers to the dark colour of the bark and that it belongs to a group of eucalypts collectively known as boxes. Boxes are identified as having bark which is persistent to the trunk, branches and often to the twigs.

The Tree.

Black Box is a small to medium sized tree, usually growing between 10 and 20 metres with diameters up to 600 mm. They usually have a dense and spreading crown, often with a straggly form.



Leaves and buds

The bark is dark grey to black in colour, hard and persistent – i.e. common to most of the tree including the small branches. The bark is finely fissured, but on old trees becomes deeply furrowed on the trunks. The trunk is often short and of poor form. The foliage is typically dull green to bluish green and is readily recognisable in mixed forests. The mature leaves are long and spear shaped, up to 150 mm long.



Black box, at Renmark

The buds, flowers and fruit occur in numerous umbels of 7 to 11, which then form large terminal groups (probably the reason for the reference to *largiflorens*). The tiny flowers (up to 3mm

each) are usually white but sometimes turn pink with age.

Habitat.

Black Box has a wide distribution, covering most of the Murray-Darling basin. It grows as far north as Injune in Queensland, through much of western Victoria and in the Gawler River area in South Australia. It is common around much of the River Murray in South Australia, especially in the Riverland. Black Box typically grows in the heavy clay soils of the floodplains adjoining the river systems. River Red Gum is the primary tree of our riverine systems, with Black Box adjoining it on the flood plains. Occasionally the two are intermixed. Other trees often associated with Black Box are Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*), River Cooba (*Acacia stenophylla*) and Broughton Willow (*Acacia salicina*)

Timber.

Black Box is a hard and heavy and durable timber with a recorded density of about 1090 kg per cub metre. It is not a commercial timber and therefore little is known about its properties. The wood in the branches has pale yellow brown sapwood and brown heartwood, while mature wood has much darker brown to red heartwood.



Old wood bowl, branch wood egg

It has a fine grain and turns very well. In my experience, branch material dries with little degrade, but larger sections need care when drying as they seem to check readily. As with most of our woods it pays to apply end sealer soon after cutting sections. Although not common, I recently saw some bowls turned from Black Box burls. They showed beautiful figure and colour and were all very distinctive.

Ron Allen

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