

Jelutong

Dyera costulata

During my early years of teaching, Jelutong was one of the common timbers stocked in woodwork centres. However it has been overharvested and in some areas has been protected and is now quite difficult to obtain.

Other names

Jelutong bukit, Jelutong paya.

Derivation of names

Dyera – in honour of Sir W T Thistelton-Dyer, a renown botanist of the 19th C.

costulata – Latin for ribbed, referring to the ribbed seedpod.



The tree

A tall erect tree growing to 60 metres, often having no branches to half its height. The straight bole is up to 2.5 metres in diameter and is quite cylindrical. It is a fast growing tree of the tropic rainforests. The leaves are quite large and appear in flat clusters. They are glossy green with prominent venation.

Habitat

There are 2 species of *Dyera* (*D costulata* and *D lowii*), which are native to Malaya, Borneo and southern Thailand. Only *D costulata* is found in Malaya.



Timber

The wood is a uniform yellow to straw colour with little difference in colour between the heartwood and the sapwood. It can be discoloured by sap stains when first cut and rapid drying soon after felling is essential. Light in weight with an average air dried weight of 27 p.c.f (420 Kg per cub metre), compare Radiata Pine 500Kg/cub m and Balsa about 20 Kg/cub m. The wood is soft and very easy to work. It has a very fine and even texture with no definitive annual or growth rings (springwood and autumn wood). The timber has low strength properties and has a low durability.

Jelutong planes easily and produces a lustre off the plane. It works well with all hand tools and is excellent for carving. The appearance is often marred by the occurrence of slit like passages called latex cavities. It has no taste but has a distinctive odour. Sawdust from Jelutong has been reported to cause allergic dermatitis with some people.



Main Uses

Jelutong is used for its wood. Along with balsa it is technically a hardwood with many properties similar to that wood. These properties such as the low density, straight grain and fine texture mean it is easy to work with and hence popular with model makers and within the patternmaking trade. In addition, Jelutong has been traditionally tapped for latex and from the 1920s through the 1960s, it was an important source of latex used to make chewing gum.

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