

River Cooba

Acacia stenophylla

There are at least three wattles with a common name of Cooba. The most common is River Cooba (Acacia stenophylla), others are Cooba or Broughton Willow or Willow Wattle (Acacia salicina) and Little Cooba also known as Umbrella Bush (Acacia ligulata). All three are native to South Australia.

Derivation of names

Acacia from Greek 'akakia', referring to the sharp thorns characteristic of several species.

stenophylla – in two parts - from Greek, *stenos*– meaning narrow, and Greek *phyllon* – leaf , thus narrow leaves.

Other Names

Eumong, Native Willow, River Myall.

The Tree

Usually a tall or sometimes a bushy tree from 4 to 8 metres high forming a willow type habit, usually dividing into stems about 1 metre above the ground. The weeping form is similar to that of Broughton Willow (*A. salicina*). The weeping form is further enhanced by the very long leaves (phyllodes). Phyllodes are modified leaves and in this case are very long – up to 400 mm long and almost circular in cross section. They are designed to prevent loss of moisture through transpiration (being arid lands plants). Their natural environment is in country receiving between 150 and 250 mm of annual rainfall. The flowers are typical wattle type, spherical shaped in small racemes of up to 5, however they are sometimes singular. The fruit are long legumes to 150 mm long with constrictions between the individual seeds. The bark on the main stems is hard, furrowed and quite dark in colour.



In ideal conditions it is bright green tree with an attractive weeping form. Young trees growing along river banks look lush and are quite beautiful, while old trees tend to be somewhat gnarled and dry.

Habitat

River Cooba is a riparian tree, ie usually growing on river banks, watercourses or floodplains. It usually grows in association with River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), Black Box (*E. largiflorens*) and Coolabah (*E. coolabah* or *E. microtheca*). In South Australia, it is common in the Lake Eyre region and the northern parts of the state. There is a small disjunct distribution on the banks of the River Murray between Blanchetown and Renmark. It is also quite common throughout the Murray-Darling basin. It is native to all mainland states.



Timber

Like many of our Acacia's it is not a commercial timber, and therefore little is written about the qualities of the timber. It is very similar to Broughton Willow (*A salicina*), which is often seen as similar to our famous Blackwood, indeed Broughton Willow is often called "Poor Man's Blackwood". The sapwood is yellow to straw in colour while the heartwood is pale to darker brown. It has subtle growth ring figure. The texture is fine and even. It is quite dense, weighing about 900 kilograms per cubic metre. It seems to be relatively stable and air dries with little degrade, however it is still wise to seal end grain when any section is cut. It works easily and is excellent for woodturning. I have encountered some difficulty in finishing. After sanding it sometimes leaves a gritty feel. This is also apparent when applying Danish oil or waxes.



Ron Allen