

Rose Mahogany/Australian Rosewood

Dysoxylum fraserianum

Close to the pedestrian entrance at gate 14 in the main entrance to the Waite Arboretum is a very green, attractive Rose Mahogany, which was planted in 1929. This tree has performed very well in the Arboretum considering its natural habitat and Adelaide's rainfall.

It is a tree of the sub tropical rainforests, ranging from Wyong south of Newcastle to the Queensland border area around Killarney. Although this is a large distance the distribution is scattered. The best specimens are found in the forests on the Dorrigo Plateau in northern coastal New South Wales. These are very different conditions from those in Adelaide.



Derivation of names

Dysoxylum is from the Greek *dys* - ill smelling and *xylon* - wood referring to some species which have an unpleasant aroma. One of these is Rusty Mahogany (*D. rufum*) a specimen also growing in the Arboretum. Another important commercial timber from the genus is Miva Mahogany or Red Bean (*D. muelleri*). Both these Australian species are sometimes called Onionwood because of the strong onion aroma in the freshly cut bark. Miva Mahogany is listed amongst Australia's most toxic timbers - the dust of which can cause congestion of lungs, eye and mucosal irritation, headache, nosebleeds and loss of appetite.

The Tree

There are about 80 species of the genus growing across the botanical region of Malesia (a botanical region from India to Australia and New Zealand). Nine species are native to Australia, limited to the sub tropical and tropical regions.

The common names of *Dysoxylum fraserianum* are Rosewood or Australian Rosewood and the standard trade name of the timber is Rose Mahogany. Unlike the ill smelling derivation described above, Rose Mahogany gets its name from the pleasant rose fragrance emitted from the freshly cut bark. This is also experienced when working the wood, and although it is vague it is permanent. The true Rosewoods belong to the Genus *Dalbergia* many of which have and retain a strong rose fragrance. Australian Rosewood also gets its common name from the fragrance and not the colour of the wood.

At its best, when growing in forests it is a tall tree growing to 57 metres with a trunk up to 1.5 metres in diameter, but is much smaller and denser when grown in the open. Certainly the specimen in the arboretum is shorter with a beautiful dark green and

dense rounded crown, in fact the branches start at ground level. The leaves are bright green and pinnate with up to 12 leaflets.

The flowers are fragrant and cream to mauve in colour, up to 8mm and in panicles. The fruit is a pink to reddish brown capsule which is globular or pear shaped. When ripe they dehisce into four longitudinal slits revealing several lustrous red seeds.

The wood is closer in appearance to Mahogany than Rosewood, often having interlocking grain showing fine zig-zag patterns. Rose Mahogany is a desired timber for furniture construction, although dust created when sanding can cause irritation to the nostrils. The sapwood is pale and the heartwood varies from pale to dark reddish brown. The wood is reasonably hard and heavy - about 720 Kg per cubic metre (c.f. Jarrah about 820 Kg per cubic metre).

The wood is often oily clogging up abrasive paper. Such wood tends to sweat and make finishing difficult, in some occasions preventing the finish from hardening properly. To overcome this condition, the surface has to be wiped with a solvent before applying further coats of finish.



References

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