

Jacaranda

Jacaranda mimosifolia

I was having some difficulty in selecting a tree for this issue. However on leaving an exhibition committee meeting at the Burnside Civic Centre this week, I drove down Fisher Street to avoid the busy traffic on Portrush Road I was amazed with the sight of a long avenue of Jacarandas in full flower. Not only were the trees displaying their beautiful blue flowers, but the ground beneath was a striking carpet of these spent but colourful flowers. Jacaranda is a relatively common timber amongst us and I thought that there would be plenty of material giving technical detail about the wood, making this a simple exercise. WRONG! I have found little information about the wood itself, but some interesting detail about the tree and the number and variety of names given to it.

Derivation of names

Jacaranda - from Portuguese - derived from the Brazilian Indian name for the tree

mimosifolia - with leaves like the Mimosa - Sensitive plants which have fine bi-pinnate leaves.



bipinnate leaves

Other Names

In *Timbers of the World - 2 - South America*, published by the Timber Research and Development Association is the following quote, which added to my confusion. "The name Jacaranda is often confusing since it is applied to many species (some entirely unrelated). One important group of Jacarandas is the product of the genus *Machaerium*".

This is not the Jacaranda we know as it is similar to the Rosewoods. Add to this the name Jacaranda as Brazilian Rosewood (*Dalbergia nigra*). Many of the US timber merchants on the internet refer to Jacaranda as Brazilian Rosewood.

The Jacaranda that we know as a common street tree belongs to a different Genus, *Jacaranda*. In addition there are several common names, most having tribal or local origins.

The Tree

A spectacular garden tree. It is a deciduous tree growing to about 20 metres. It has a graceful form with spreading branches and a light crown. The bark is pale greyish brown, rather smooth and slightly furrowed.

The most spectacular aspect is the way in which (in normal conditions), the blue-violet flowers appear in mass before the leaves develop, thus developing a crown of blue without any foliage.



in full flower!

The flowers are up to 5 cm long, and are grouped in 300mm panicles. They appear in spring and early summer, and last for up to two months. The flowers develop into flat rounded woody capsules up to 70 mm in diameter with wavy edges. When they dry on the tree they release many light winged seeds. These propagate easily.

The leaves usually appear after the first flush of flowers. These are also spectacular, being large compound leaves, in fact bi-pinnate leaves up to 400 mm long, with each of the pinnae bearing numerous small pointed leaflets, like mimosa plants, thus the botanical name.



The flowers, with last year's fruit

Habitat

High altitude and desert areas of Brazil and parts of South America. It is now a common tree in California and is regarded as an **invasive species** in South Africa and Queensland. Brisbane often highlights the Jacaranda as a festival tree as does Grafton in NSW.

Timber.

Jacaranda is a light weight timber, weighing about 550 Kg per cub metre, similar to that of Radiata Pine. The sapwood and heartwood are of similar colour usually dull white to oatmeal in colour with prominent but narrow growth rings. The timber has a fine grain, works well and has a natural lustre.

It is not considered to be durable. The wood dries quickly and is quite stable during the drying process. Its working qualities and stability are clearly indicated when it seems to be a choice timber for our top turners.

I believe that it would be also an excellent timber for carvers and for scrollers.

Main Uses

It is not considered to be a major commercial timber in South America, but then they have such a wealth of fine timbers. It is said to be used for cheap furniture, match sticks, concrete form work, particle board, pulp and paper. However as woodies it should always be seen as a valuable "found" timber.

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