



# Swamp Gum

## *Eucalyptus ovata*

Tasmania has 29 species of eucalypt. One of these, *Eucalyptus ovata*, is commonly called the swamp gum and provides an important food source for swift parrots.

### Where it occurs

Swamp gums generally occur in poorly drained, swampy areas with sandy or clay soils.

It is widespread throughout eastern Australia, including New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Bass Strait islands.

In Tasmania it occurs throughout the east and north of the state with scattered populations in the west. Swamp gums grow in a variety of terrain, from exposed coastal sites through to mountain foothills.

### Other names

The swamp gum is widespread throughout eastern Australia and it has several different common names. In Tasmania, *Eucalyptus ovata* is generally called the swamp gum but may also be referred to as the black or Marrawah gum.

The swamp gum is sometimes confused with *Eucalyptus brookerana* with which it shares a superficial resemblance. Occasionally *E. ovata* hybridises with *E. brookerana* producing intermediate plants.

The name *Eucalyptus ovata* refers to the shape of the leaf. In the juvenile and intermediate state the leaf is oval-shaped.

### Distinctive features

Usually a medium-sized tree, under the right conditions it can reach up to 30 m in height. This tree is often found in swampy areas and in this environment the tree is usually smaller in size.

The base of the tree is usually covered in rough, dark grey bark extending a short way up the trunk. The rest of the trunk and branches shed long ribbons of bark, leaving a smooth creamy white or pink surface.

Juvenile and adult leaves are rounded (ovate) and the adult leaves are longer and thinner. The leaves are a rich



Swamp gum (*Eucalyptus ovata*), Photo: Rob Wiltshire

glossy green, alternate (each pair of leaves offset rather than directly opposite each other) on the stem and hang downwards. The buds are diamond-shaped and have up to seven flowers.

### Food for parrots

The swamp gum is an important food plant for swift parrots. These parrots only breed in Tasmania. They arrive here in spring and feed on the nectar from blue and swamp gum flowers. Besides the blue gum, the swamp gum is the most important source of nectar for swift parrots during the breeding season.

Swamp gums flower from July to October - earlier than the blue gum which flowers from September to December.

The early flowering of swamp gum makes it an important food source when the swift parrots first arrive back in Tasmania.

## Replanting habitat

When replanting swift parrot habitat in poorly drained areas, it is important to include swamp gums. Swamp gums can be grown from seed collected in the local area. Trees are considered adult when the diamond-shaped buds and conical gum nuts are present on the tree.

To collect seed you should gather gumnuts. They can then be placed on a piece of paper on a window ledge in the sun. When heated, the gumnuts release their tiny seeds.

Swamp gums are part of a community of plants. Often they grow as a part of a woodland, open forest or tall open-forest community.

Other eucalypts which often grow in association with swamp gums in southeast Tasmania are: blue gum, *E. globulus*; stringybark, *E. obliqua*; white peppermint, *E. pulchella* and white gum, *E. viminalis*.

It is also important to replant a suitable native understorey. In open-forest areas, native grasses and shrubs are an important part of the plant community.

## Further information

Kirkpatrick J. B. and Backhouse S. (1989). *Native Trees of Tasmania*. Pandani Press, Hobart.

Naughton P. (1995). *Forest Trees of Tasmania Field Guide*. Forest Resources, Tasmania.

## Contact

Biodiversity Conservation Branch: DPIPWE

134 Macquarie Street, Hobart 7000

Phone: (03) 6233 6556

Fax: (03) 6233 3477



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