

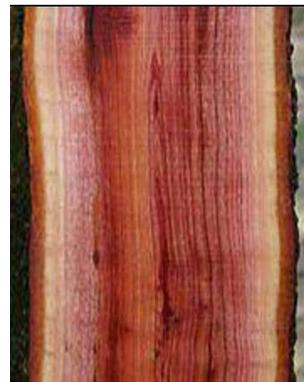


## Red Cedar

### Red Gold

The highly prized Australian Red Cedar was often referred to as "Red Gold" during the early pioneering years of Australia and was undoubtedly the most valuable of the timbers found in the coastal brush lands of New South Wales.

The timber is known for its softness, texture and rich red colour (hence the common name of Red Cedar) and is used extensively for furniture, wood panelling and construction, including shipbuilding.



It was heavily and unsustainably exploited in the 19th and early 20th centuries and almost all the large trees have been cut out and the species is essentially commercially extinct and availability of this timber is now limited.

**Family:** *Meliaceae*

**Genus:** *Toona*

**Botanic name:** *Toona ciliata*

*Toona* from *toon* or *tun*, an Indian name for this tree; *ciliata* derived from Latin, meaning having fine hairs, which relates to the fine hairs on the edge of the leaf or leaf margin which resemble an eyelash

**Also known as:** Australian Red Cedar, Burma Cedar, Indian Cedar; it is also known as Indian mahogany. Indigenous names: Polai in the Illawarra, Woolia on the Richmond River, Mamin and Mugurpul near Brisbane, and Woota at Wide Bay

**Origin:** Parts of Asia and New Guinea, native of east coasts of NSW and Queensland

**Habitat:** A forest tree in the mahogany family it prefers the moist to wet tropics and subtropics, where it is found at elevations from 400-2,800m.

**Description:** The stem is erect and frequently buttressed with spreading branches and greyish brown bark. The leaves are dark glossy green 15-45cm long and pinnate with 6 leaflet pairs. The rough bark of the Red Cedar provides an excellent grip for the many epiphytic plants which make their home among the high branches of the Red Cedar. As one of Australia's native deciduous trees, the leaves will fall in autumn (late March) and grow back in spring (early September). Being deciduous, Red Cedars shed a massive load of leaves each year which provides organic matter for the soil and habitat for invertebrates.



Flowers are white, fragrant with 5 petals and 0.8cm long occurring in dense terminal clusters and appearing in Spring. The fruit is a thin, dry, woody capsule, which splits into five valves. The seeds inside have a papery, wing shape appendage which is used in wind dispersal.

**Propagation and cultivation:** Propagation is by fresh seed. The cedar tip moth lays its eggs on the tree's leading shoot, allowing the larvae to burrow into the stem. This causes dieback and a multi-branched tree with little commercial value.



**Interesting facts:** These giant Red Cedars of Australia were magnificent trees – growing up to 60m tall with girths of up to 11.5m recorded – literally towering over surrounding trees. The largest recorded Red Cedar tree felled in Australia was in 1883 from the Nulla Nulla Creek in the Upper Macleay, NSW producing 240 cu m of timber. One of the few remaining giants, a 500 year old Red Cedar, heritage listed, and located in the Atherton Tableland fell victim to Cyclone Larry on the March 20, 2006. It measured 9.7m in diameter.

**Uses:** The leaves can be cooked and consumed as food. Medicinally, the bark is used in the treatment of chronic dysentery and wounds. It also yields a resinous gum which is used to treat boils. The flowers are used to stimulate menstrual flow in women. Also, it yields dye. The bark produces tannin and fibres. The fruits yield aromatic oil. The wood is used for shiitake mushroom culture.

### Sources:

Encyclopaedia Botanica by Frances Bodkin

<https://poi-australia.com.au/>

<http://www.anbg.gov.au/gnp/trainees-2017/toona-ciliata.html>

<https://pfaf.org>

ID # 86