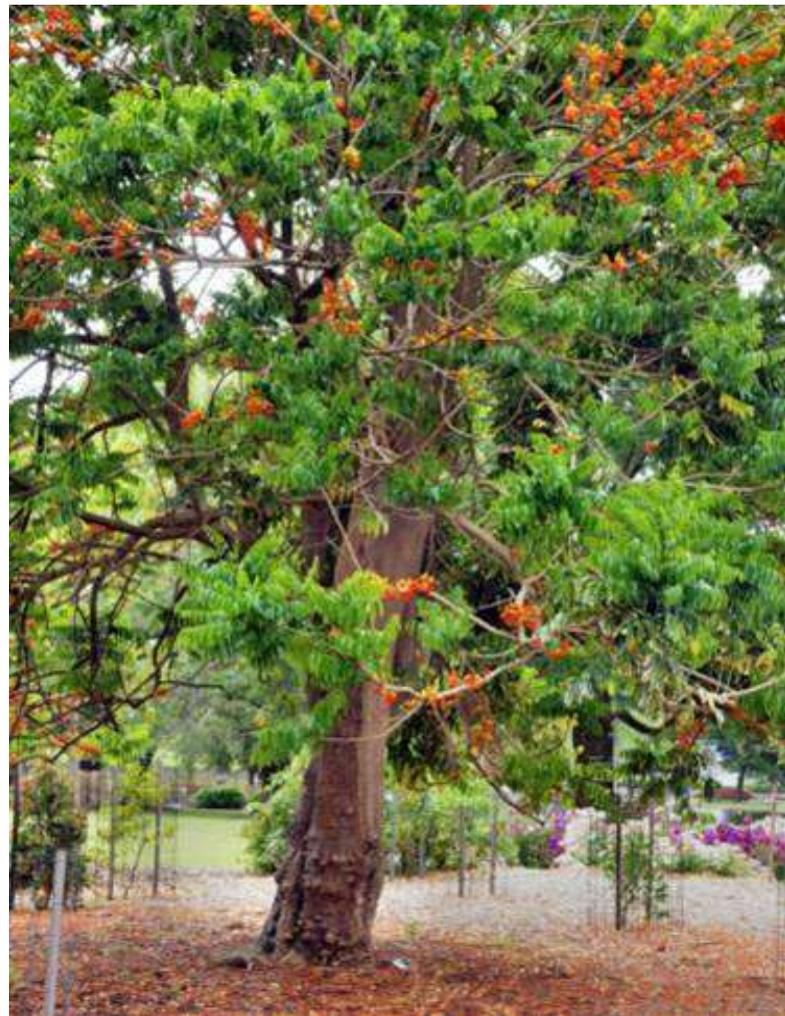




Black Bean

ID # 36



Used by indigenous people for thousands of years

Aboriginal people have prepared and eaten the Black Bean seeds for at least 2,500 years. The unprocessed seeds are poisonous, and can cause vomiting and diarrhoea but are edible when carefully prepared by roasting – traditionally the seeds were steamed, with wet candlenut leaves, in a ground oven for a day. They are then cut up into small pieces, leached with running water for several days, and pounded into flour to make bush damper.



Due to its importance as a food, the Black Bean Tree was a seasonal gathering point for Aboriginal peoples, and this acted as a catalyst for ceremonies. The bark fibre has been used for fish and animal traps, nets and baskets, and the empty seed pods as toy boats. The tree has been used as a seasonal signal for when to hunt jungle fowl. The wood was used by Aboriginal people for spear throwers.

Sources:

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castanospermum>
- <https://www.anbg.gov.au/gnp/interns-2002/castanospermum-australe.html>
- <https://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/stories/2017/black-bean>

Family: *Fabaceae*

Genus: *Angylocalyceae*

Botanic name: *Castanospermum australe*

Castanospermum – from two words: *castanea* Latin for chestnut and *spermum* Greek for seeded; *Australe* – Latin for southern, here referring to the southern hemisphere

Also known as: Moreton Bay Chestnut, Black Bean or Bean Tree. Indigenous names include *irtalie* and *bogum* in northern New South Wales, and *baway*, *yiwurra*, *junggurraa*, *mirrayn*, *ganyjuu*, and *binyjaalga*

Origin: Native to the east coast of Australia from around Lismore, NSW to Cape York Peninsula on the Queensland coast and 160km west to the Bunya Mountains. Also Pacific islands of Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and the island of New Britain (Papua New Guinea).

Habitat: Found in coastal rainforests, beaches and adjacent mountains, where it grows in moist, fertile, well-drained soils on terraces on the side of mountains or along the banks of rivers and streams.

Description: It reaches a height of 40m at maturity though commonly smaller. A handsome evergreen tree with glossy dark green pinnate leaves and low spreading branches when grown in the open. Under cultivation it will develop a dense rounded canopy and reach a height of 8-20m with a spread of 4-8 m.



Sprays of red and yellow pea-shaped flowers 3-4 cm long appear during October-November, but can be partially hidden by the dense foliage. The nectar produced by the flowers attracts birds, bats and butterflies.



Following flowering in March-May fruiting occurs. The fruit is a large cylindrical pod 12–20 centimetres long and 4–6 centimetres diameter, the interior is divided by a spongy substance into one to five cells, each of which contains a large bean-like seed. These pods then split in two, revealing the “beans” which weigh about 30 grams.



Propagation and cultivation: Because the seeds are too heavy for wind dispersal and too big for animals to disperse, it is believed that the trees were spread by hand when Aboriginal people carried the seeds across country as an important food source. It has also recently been discovered that all the trees in New South Wales are descended from a single seed. The plant naturally spreads by water. The Black Bean Tree can be propagated from fresh seed though it is slow to establish so most often sold as indoor ornamental plant and more commonly used as a shade tree in public parks.

Uses: Valuable for timber, with a durability rating above-ground of over 40 years. The strong root system can be used to consolidate stream banks against erosion, but it should not be planted near drainage lines or house foundations. The leaves and seeds are toxic to livestock.