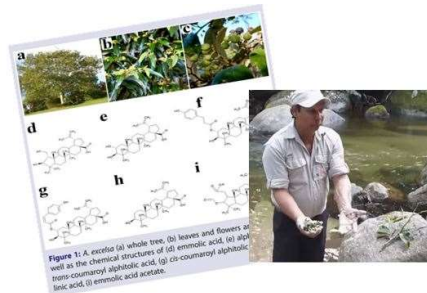




## Red Ash

### Nature's chemist shop?



The Red Ash leaves, bark and roots are considered effective in treating common place ailments by indigenous people due to anti-inflammatory chemicals in the plant.

Traditional uses range from bush soap made by rubbing the leaves that contain saponin in water to create a lather, to various infusions, one uses crushed leaves to reduce headaches and sore eyes and treat insect bites and stings while bark and root infusions relieve muscle aches or are gargled to relieve toothache. And young leaves were chewed to aid gastric upset.

### Uses

Wood is straight grained and darkens with age to a bright red colour, useful for cabinetmaking, tool handles, building and for boat-building. The common name "Coopers Wood" came from widespread use for barrels and buckets. It is also use as a fodder plant for sheep and cattle as it is not astringent.

### Propagation and cultivation

Propagation is from seed, which germinates fairly easily. Tree grows comparatively fast.

**Family:** *Rhamnaceae*

**Genus:** *Alphitonia*

**Botanic name:** *Alphitonia excelsa*

From Ancient Greek, *alphiton* meaning "barley-meal", referring to the mealy red covering around the hard cells in the fruit; *excelsa*, from Latin meaning "lofty" or "high", because of its tall habit

**Also known as:** Red Ash, Soap Tree, Leatherjacket, Coopers Wood

**Origin:** Endemic to Australia – naturally growing in New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory and northern Western Australia; south to the south coast of NSW.

**Habitat:** Generally found in open eucalypt forests and adjoining rainforests, in scrub and open forest, often in sheltered gullies or on steep slopes. Found along the coast, on lower tablelands and on slopes with a western aspect. Grows in climate zones that have a warm humid summer and a mild winter or in warmer temperate environments.

**Description:** A small to medium-sized tree often with well-formed umbrella-shaped, round, spreading canopy. Foliage extends to near ground level. Up to 35m tall in wild rainforest settings but usually only reaching about 10m under cultivation. Semi-deciduous in particularly dry winters.

The alternate leaves are glossy dark-green above and silver/white underneath with prominent veins; lanceolate to elliptical, mostly 5-14cm long, 2-5cm wide. New shoots smell of sarsaparilla when crushed.

Small greenish-white flowers cover the tree in clusters in late autumn and early winter and are pleasantly fragrant in the evening.

The blue-black fleshy fruits are globular, 10mm in diameter, and contain two seeds. They also have a mealy material within.



**Interesting Fact:** Native birds are attracted to the fleshy blue-black fruits. It is the sole host-plant of the Green-Banded Blue; and a host-plant of the Blue Jewel Indigo Flash and Fiery Jewel butterflies.



### Sources:

<https://www.anbg.gov.au/gnp/gnp6/alph-exc.htm>

<https://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/NSWfl.pl?page=nswfl&lvl=sp&name=Alphitonia~excelsa>

<https://dengarden.com/gardening/Soap-Tree-Alphitonia-excelsa-Red-Ash>

Mossman Gorge Information Centre

ID # 200