



Celerywood

ID # 106



An identifying odour leads to a common name



Historically, old rainforest-grown trees had a trunk diameter of 75cm (these large trees are a rarity now) and were cut down for their soft timber to make disposable items like fruit cases (before the advent of cardboard cases). The loggers would identify these trees by the faint celery odour of the fresh bark when rubbed.

Crushed fresh leaflets and twigs give off an even stronger smell, leading to its common name Celerywood.

Propagation and cultivation

Seed is fertile for regeneration from the droppings of the pied currawong. It also regenerates prolifically after a disturbance and each year produces large crops of fruit.

Uses

The flat celerywood fruit is eaten by a large variety of birds, including brown cuckoo dove, Australasian figbird, green catbird, Lewin's honeyeater, olive-backed oriole, pied currawong, paradise riflebird, rose crowned fruit dove, silvereye, superb fruit dove, topknot pigeon and wompoo fruit dove.

Family: *Araliaceae*

Genus: *Polyscias*

Botanic name: *Polyscias elegans* (C. Moore & F. Mueller) Harms
Polyscias: from the Greek words *poly* meaning many and *skias* meaning shade (possibly referring to the shade from many leaves), canopy or umbel (a flower cluster)

Also known as: Celerywood, Silver Basswood, Black Pencil Cedar, Mowbular Whitewood, and White Sycamore

Origin: Rainforests of eastern Australia – from southern N.S.W. to northern Queensland

Habitat: Grows in a range of different rainforest habitats, from fertile basaltic soils, to sand dunes and less fertile sedimentary soils.



Description: A medium-sized evergreen canopy tree reaching a height of 30m. Fast-growing with elegant foliage that forms an attractive palm-like or umbrella-shaped crown. The trunk is mostly straight and cylindrical, smooth-barked on young trees but fissured, scaly and rough-barked on larger trees.



Large glossy leaves are large, pinnate or bi-pinnate with almost opposite leaflets, often in threes. Leaflets ovate in shape, with a point 5-13cm long.

Purple flowers form on a terminal panicle, arranged in a series of racemes in the months of February to April. However, flowers can form at other times.



The fruit, a drupe, turns dark purple to almost black in colour when fully ripe, 5-7mm wide and flattened and rounded in shape. Inside the drupe are two cells, containing one seed each, 5mm long. Fruit ripens over autumn into winter and is not particularly juicy.

Sources:

- <https://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/NSWfl.pl?page=nswfl&lvl=sp&name=Polyscias~elegans>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polyscias_elegans
- http://www.canbr.gov.au/cpbr/cd-keys/RFK7/key/RFK7/Media/Html/entities/Polyscias_elegans.htm