



Red Olive Plum

ID # 129



An all-round delight



The Red Olive Plum tree, with its masses of colourful berries, is an attractive ornamental plant that delights home gardeners. It also produces timber that woodworkers describe as “a delight to work with.”

This timber, when the tree is harvested in the wild, is primarily used for cabinet making, and also for making staves, oars and shingles.

Not so delightful however, is the taste of the berries, they are fit to eat at all.

Propagation and cultivation

A slow-growing plant, sensitive to frost and drought it is best grown from semi-hardwood cuttings.

Family: *Celastraceae*

Genus: *Elaeodendron*

Botanic name: *Elaeo* is a term for olive in Greek; *dendron* = Greek for tree (syn *Cassine australis* because of the early botanical recognition of the resemblance of its fruit to that of the olive tree of Mauritius, *Cassine orientalis*)

Also known as: Red-fruited Olive Plum; Blush Plum; Blush Boxwood

Origin: Endemic to Australia, found along the coast from NE Queensland south to Tuross Heads in south-east NSW and inland to the Western Slopes of the Great Divide

Habitat: On well-drained soils in drier rainforests on the coast and inland at elevations up to 1000m, often with the coastal Kauri Pine (*Agathis robusta*)



Description: A tall shrub or small tree which is evergreen, growing to 8m. It is generally a dioecious species (i.e. having separate male and female plants that both have to be grown if fruit and seeds are sought).

There is some evidence that the stem bark has anti-tumour activity.

Its broad elliptical leaves are glossy with toothed or wavy edges that taper to a blunt tip. The leaves, which are usually 2.4-15cm long and 0.4-1cm wide, occur opposite each other.



Separate male and female flowers are few in number, small with four petals 2.5mm long, yellowish-green in colour.

Male flowers have four stamens and female flowers have four staminodes.

Flowering occurs in spring and summer and the fruit is a fleshy, globular or egg-shaped, from 10–25 mm long generally with only one seed per fruit.

The fruit is ripe from March to July and often persists on the tree for many months. These fleshy fruits are conspicuous, bright orange-red then turning black when ripe.



Sources:

<https://www.anbg.gov.au/photo/apii/genus/Elaeodendron>
Bodkin, Frances (1992). Encyclopaedia Botanica: The Essential Reference Guide to Native and Exotic Plants in Australia
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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elaeodendron_australe