

Eucalyptus tereticornis (Queensland Blue Gum)

Prominent as a remnant tree in Tewantin where I live are Queensland Blue Gums (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*). They are recognizable for their smooth mottled grey bark which is shed in summer as the trunk grows in girth to reveal fresh bark in shades of blue-grey and salmon-pink. Sometimes at the base, particularly of older trees, is a short stocking of rough bark.



(referring to the flower) and *tereticornis* meaning horn shaped.

Used in heavy construction for posts and piles, railway sleepers etc., the heartwood is hard, durable and red, giving the tree its alternative common name, Forest Red Gum. It is closely related to the River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), Australia's most widely distributed and probably best-known eucalypt. *E. tereticornis* also has affinities with other Red Gums native to the Sunshine Coast such as *E. kabiana* (Beerwah Red Gum), *E. bancroftii* (Tumbledown Gum) and *E. exserta* (Queensland Peppermint), the latter being notable for having fibrous rather than gum bark. What they do have in common is fruit with exserted (protruding) valves and long conical opercula (flower bud caps). It is the nature of the operculum that is described by the plant's botanical name – *Eucalyptus* meaning well covered

The flowers, generally white but sometimes pink on older trees, are an important source of nectar and pollen for birds, animals and insects.

This alone is good reason to value their place in the local landscape, but the character they lend locations such as the Noosa River foreshore at Noosaville and much of Tewantin is invaluable. They are also a primary food tree of koalas.



As older parts of Tewantin face the pressure of popularity, houses are being demolished or moved to be replaced by two or more new houses on narrow blocks of land with little room for trees. As a consequence, the spacious character of Tewantin is being lost and barely a month goes by without the removal of another Blue Gum – on footpaths, in front and back yards, even from parks. I'm aware that in some cases this is necessary if the tree is in dangerous condition. Sadly however, healthy Blue Gums that are an inconvenience are also being cut down. At least twenty street trees in my immediate neighbourhood have been removed in the last few years and replaced by Noosa Council with non-local natives such as Pongamias and Golden Pendas, both of which are becoming weedy in nearby bushland.

With this in mind, the North Tewantin Bushcare Group has been propagating Blue Gums of local provenance for planting in suitable places. Note in the photo the black seed amongst the brown chaff released by the fruit.



When Noosa Shire was nominated for Biosphere status, Tewantin was declared an area that valued its remaining indigenous trees. Although common in the bush – their natural distribution extends from Gippsland, Victoria to Laura in North Queensland – Blue Gums in urban areas all over the Sunshine Coast are steadily disappearing. I would urge anyone who has the room to grow a magnificent and iconic Queensland Blue Gum.

