

# ***Syncarpia glomulifera* (Turpentine)**

You'd expect a tree called Turpentine to be highly flammable. It is, in fact, difficult to ignite, one of the world's most resistant to damage by fire. *Syncarpia glomulifera* has acquired its common name due to the resin which flows between bark and wood and this no doubt contributes to another highly regarded feature: its resistance to decay, termites and marine organisms. Other attributes such as a straight trunk up to 50 metres in height and the fine

interlocked grain (giving the wood strength and durability) have increased its value as a source of timber.



One distinctive feature of Turpentine is that major limbs often branch from the main trunk at 90 degrees, then turn skyward at 45 degrees, creating an elbow. This can be seen circled in red in the photo on the left.

The quality of timber from the similar Satinay or Peebeen (*Syncarpia hillii*) was initially considered inferior due to problems with shrinkage, and large quantities were wasted during harvesting of other trees judged more desirable. Once its qualities were realised, however, huge numbers of trunks began to be exported from Queensland to England and Egypt in the 1930s. They were used to re-line the London wharves and the Suez Canal, with the latter alone consuming over 50,000 trunks. Apart from a few isolated occurrences on North Stradbroke and Moreton Islands, Satinay is found only on Fraser Island and in the Cooloola area - the trees in Satinay Park, Tewantin, may well be at its southern distribution limit on the mainland. Keeping in mind this restricted distribution, it's just as well the harvesting of Satinay ceased with the Australian Government's banning of export licences in 1991 or we might have found ourselves in a situation similar to England's: by 1770 most of southern England's forests had been consumed by the British Navy. The only other member of the genus is *Syncarpia verecunda*, found in the high altitude, wet eucalypt forests of southeast Queensland such as those at Mt. Mee and Ravensbourne National Park near Toowoomba.

*Syncarpia glomulifera* is much more widely distributed, the main distribution being from Batemans Bay to Gympie, with disjunct occurrences on Blackdown, Consuelo, Atherton and Windsor Tablelands. It is usually found growing in wet sclerophyll forest in association with Tallowwood and Flooded Gum. The previous photo was taken on the Botany Group's walk at Ringtail Creek in just such a plant community.

It is possible to mistake a Turpentine for a eucalypt but a number of characteristics allow us to distinguish the two. The leaves are opposite, the new leaves are often grouped in fours and appear as whorls. The bark is distinctly thick and fibrous with deep longitudinal furrows.



The inflorescences are also in whorls of four with bases united and seven flowers in each head. The species name **glomulifera** refers to this cluster of flowers, *glomus* meaning “ball” and *fer* “to carry”. ***Syncarpia hillii*** has similar flowers but the leaves and petioles are longer.



*Syncarpia glomulifera*



*Syncarpia hillii*

The genus name ***Syncarpia*** refers to the compound fruit which the seven flowers have fused to form – *syn*: “with” or “together” and *carpos*: “fruit”. The photos below, shown on the same scale, illustrate the larger 2 cm. fruit of ***Syncarpia hillii*** (on the right).



True turpentine is extracted from certain ***Pinus*** species and, while useful, is highly flammable and malodourous. The use of Turpentine as the common name for ***Syncarpia glomulifera*** is unfortunate as it suggests a commonality between the two that doesn't exist. I think it would have been appropriate had the Aboriginal name Yanderra or the old name used by timbergetters, Lustre, caught on.

Robert M Price, January, 2022