

## **Eucalyptus propinqua (Grey Gum)**

This tree has had an honourable mention in a previous article for its association with Spotted Gum (*Corymbia citriodora subsp. variegata*) but I think, as the most prevalent of our three local Grey Gums, it deserves an article of its own. The other two are more common in areas well away from the coast, *E. major* in drier parts such as Gympie and *E. biturbinata* (previously *E. punctata*) in the dry sclerophyll forest of the Conondale Ranges. All three have the appealing habit of shedding bark in summer to reveal a striking orange trunk.





Over the summer the orange fades to a dull, steely grey, hence the common name Grey Gum. The contrast between the two stages can be seen in the photos below.



There are other trees that can be confused with *Eucalyptus propinqua*. The previous year's bark of *Angophora leiocarpa* (Smooth-barked Apple) also peels in summer to expose fresh bark of a similar colour but, whereas Grey Gums shed long strips, Smooth-barked Apple sheds smaller, often curly strips. An admission: I spent a few years of my early botanical life using the common name Smooth BAKED Apple for this *Angophora* (*A. costata* subsp *leiocarpa* as it was then). They can be tricky, those common names.



*Angophora leiocarpa*



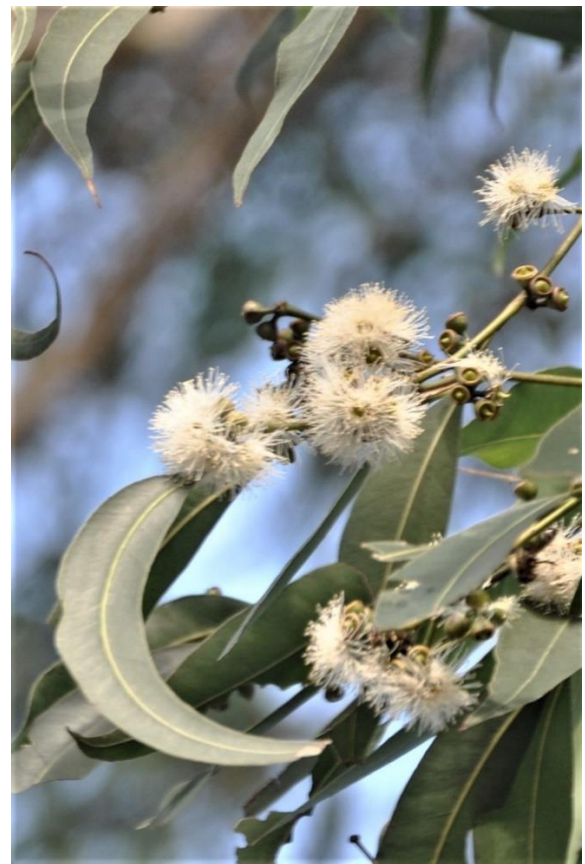
*Eucalyptus bancroftii*



I also used to confuse the orange trunks of *E. propinqua* with those of *Eucalyptus bancroftii* but soon worked out the trunks of the latter are invariably small and twisted and the bark more mottled.

The tree generally occurs within 100 km. of Australia's east coast between Wyong in NSW and Maryborough, Queensland, apart from some scattered occurrences in elevated areas at its northern limit, namely Carnarvon Range and Blackdown Tableland. Here on the Sunshine Coast it is common on slopes and ridges away from the coastal strip but the odd remnant tree can be found around Tewantin.

The flower buds are quite distinctive, almost spherical but with a short point, and slowly develop on the tree for up to a year before flowering in late summer to autumn.



*Eucalyptus major* is very similar to *E. propinqua* and in fact used to be classified as *Eucalyptus propinqua* var *major*. As mentioned, it is uncommon on the Sunshine Coast. However, in nearby drier districts where the two species overlap, a useful way of distinguishing between them is to compare their flower buds: those of *E. major* are more elongated, up to one centimetre in length, and with a beaked rather than pointed operculum.

This is just as well as the fruits of the two species are practically identical. *E. propinqua* is known as Small-fruited Grey Gum for apparently obvious reasons, having small, 4 to 5 mm. gum nuts with exserted (protruding) valves. *E. major*, Large-fruited Grey Gum, has 5 to 6 mm. gum nuts with valves that are "markedly" exserted. In other words, there's not much in it and unless you have the fruit of each side by side, it wouldn't be easy to pick the difference. In fact, the species name *propinqua* means "near" or "allied" in reference to the similarities between the species.



Small fruit of *Eucalyptus propinqua*

All three Grey Gums provide a first class structural timber that is hard, strong and extremely durable but it is ***Eucalyptus propinqua***, up to 40 m. in height with a straight trunk, which is considered the most valuable, for use in heavy engineering and as poles and railway sleepers (although they're probably all made of concrete these days).

The Grey Gums, a choice little group of three, an unremarkable grey for 11 months of the year but demanding our attention every summer when they put a show on by stripping off.

Robert M Price, March, 2022