

# Timor White Gum

## *Eucalyptus urophylla*

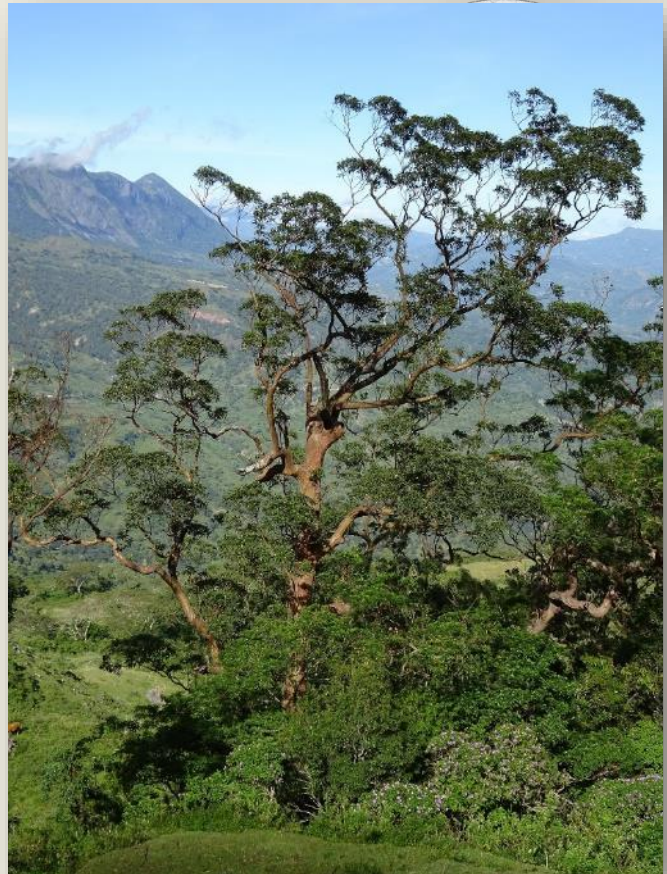
The Timor White Gum, *Eucalyptus urophylla*, is one of very few *Eucalyptus* species that are *not* native to Australia. It grows in a limited 500 km range in the Lesser Sunda Islands of Indonesia and Timor-Leste. It is the floral emblem of Timor-Leste.

The Timor White Gum often grows as the dominant species on slopes and in valleys of open montane forests, predominantly on volcanic-derived soils. It has the greatest altitudinal range of any species of eucalypt, from sea level to elevations of 3000 m.

Locally it is an important source of timber for bridges, houses (framing and flooring), furniture, fencing, fibreboard, paper, charcoal and fuel. It is also extensively planted to protect river banks from erosion, for shade, and for honey production. It continues to be grown as a plantation timber in many other parts of the world, particularly in the moist tropics. In 1919, it was introduced to Brazil where the largest *E. urophylla* plantations can be found, alongside its current status as an invasive weed. It is speculated that the Portuguese colonists took seeds from East Timor to Brazil far earlier.



Distribution of *Eucalyptus urophylla* in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. Map: IUCN Red List: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/133377485/133377487#geographic-range>

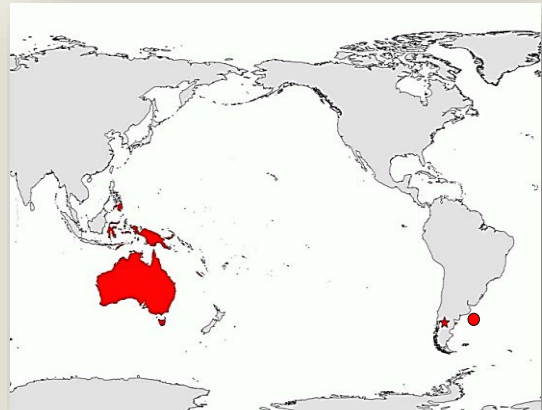


*Eucalyptus urophylla* – Mount Leolaco, East Timor. Photo: Colin Trainor, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

For a long time, the Timor White Gum was confused with *Eucalyptus alba*, with which it freely hybridises, but relatively recently it was recognised as a distinct species. It is also known to hybridise with *E. tereticornis* (Forest Red Gum), native to Australia and New Guinea, and *E. saligna* (Sydney Blue Gum, an eastern Australian endemic), both commonly seen in the Sydney region. Hybrids between *E. urophylla* and *E. grandis*, (Flooded Gum,

another eastern Australian endemic), have been developed to produce progeny that are not only more insect and disease resistant than *E. grandis*, but are also well adapted to tropical environments.

Although extant eucalypts are almost exclusively Australasian, and predominantly Australian, fossil eucalypts from the Early Eocene (about 52 Ma) have been found in the *Laguna del Hunco* paleoflora of Chubut Province in Argentina, the only fossil eucalypts ever found outside Australia or south-east Asia. Curiously, the Patagonian *Eucalyptus* fossils dominated regions subject to frequent disturbance from lava flows, earthquakes, landslides and fires and adjacent to rainforests, almost identical to the habitat of present day Timor White Gums and other eucalypt species of the islands to the north of Australia which occur naturally in humid environments on lava flows and volcanically derived soils in close proximity to rainforest. The Laguna del Hunco fossils are considered to belong to the *Eucalyptus* subgenus *Symphyomyrtus* as does the Timor White Gum, *E. urophylla*.



Distribution of extant eucalypts in Australasia and the island of Mindanao (Philippines) and location of the early Eocene *Eucalyptus* fossils in Argentina. Image from: Gandolfo et al. 2011.



Eucalypt fossils have been found in New Zealand where they are not native, and provide further evidence of the Gondwanan origins of the genus. Eucalypt fossils in both South America and New Zealand, as well as Australia, add credence to the probability that *Eucalyptus* also occurred in Antarctica which provided a landbridge between Australia and South America.

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