

Kurrajong

Brachychiton populneus

If you are travelling through central-western New South Wales and see a tree that looks as if it doesn't belong, it's probably a Kurrajong, *Brachychiton populneus*. Kurrajongs often grow as isolated specimens, they have sturdy, almost bottle-shaped trunks and dark, rich green leaves, very different from the grey-blue and khaki leaves of many of the eucalypts with which they associate.



Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneus*) flowers
Photograph: Rosemary Stapleton

About 50 million years ago, *Brachychiton* had an ancestor that grew in the rainforests that covered much of Australia. Botanists consider that the extant *Brachychiton* species we see today dispersed relatively recently and as the country became hotter and drier, some rainforest species, including *Brachychiton*, persisted by adapting to drier conditions.



Brachychiton populneus, a Kurrajong tree in Nangar National Park, central-western NSW.

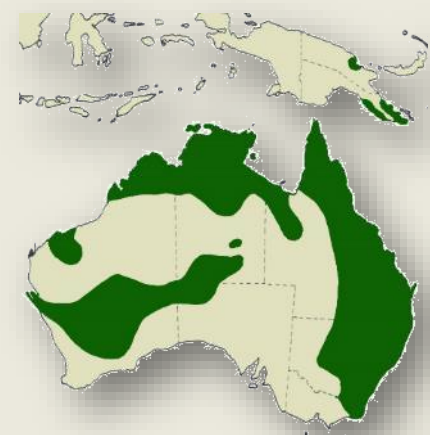


A Kurrajong tree that has been lopped to provide stock fodder

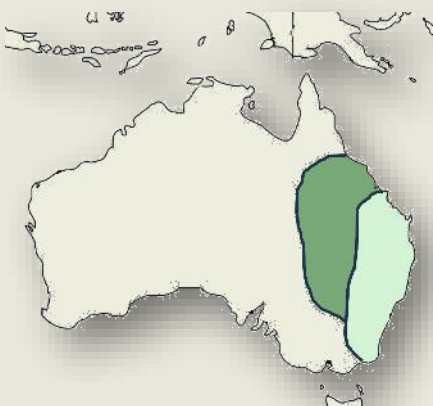
Most of the 31 species of *Brachychiton* are endemic to Australia: one species, *B. carruthersii*, occurs only in New Guinea; and *B. velutinosus* is shared between Australia and New Guinea. Most *Brachychiton* species occur in the monsoon tropics or subtropics and are deciduous or semi-deciduous in the dry season to minimise water loss during drought, despite their deep root systems.

Kurrajong trees are an exception, in that they're evergreen and can be found across the western plains from north-eastern Victoria through to Townsville, often surviving on rocky outcrops. They often occur as isolated individuals in *Eucalyptus* woodlands and forests and are also known from small pockets of specialised rainforest known as microphyll (or small leafed) vine thickets. They are fire resistant, so a sensible choice in bushfire prone areas. In

farming areas, they provide dense shelter and shade for stock and in times of drought, before leaves are dropped, branches can be cut to provide stock fodder. We understand Kurrajong foliage is cut for the giraffe at Dubbo's Western Plains Zoo.



Distribution of *Brachychiton* species in Australia and New Guinea. Modified from Guymer 1988.



Distribution of *B. populneus* subsp. *populneus* (light green), and *B. populneus* subsp. *trilobus* (dark green) in Australia. Modified from Guymer 1988.

There are two subspecies of *B. populneus*: *B. populneus* subsp. *populneus* extends from Victoria through to Queensland, from the coast to the tablelands, and the Western Plains. The second, *B. populneus* subsp. *trilobus* is restricted to further western regions of New South Wales and Queensland.

And *Brachychiton* species, including Kurrajongs, are eminently suitable for planting in

parks and gardens, not just in Australia but around the world. These include the Illawarra Flame Tree, *B. acerifolius*, the Lace Bark, *B. discolor*, and the Bottle Tree, *B. rupestris*. The latter has become a very fashionable ‘landscape statement’ in recent years.



Illawarra Flame Tree,
Brachychiton acerifolius



Lacebark,
Brachychiton discolor



Bottle Tree,
Brachychiton rupestris

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Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brachychiton_populneus

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