



**El Questro**  
THE HEART OF THE KIMBERLEY

# EL QUESTRO TOP 20 PLANTS



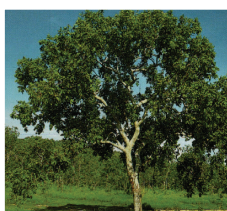
## WOOLLYBUTT

*Eucalyptus miniata*

This tree has a spreading canopy and grows up to 15 metres high. The bark is reddish-brown and stringy at the base of the trunk but smooth and white on the upper branches. Its "woolly butt" protects the tree

from fires. It flowers from May to September and the striking orange flowers attract many nectar eating birds and insects.

**Aboriginal uses:** The bark is used to construct waterproof roofs. The woollybutt is a good source of sugarbag honey, as native bees frequent the hollows in trunk and branches.



## CABBAGE GUM

*Eucalyptus confertiflora*

A medium sized tree with dense, spreading crown. The large leaves are rough like sandpaper. It flowers in the dry season around June and its nectar attracts rainbow lorikeets, fruit bats and honey eaters. Good examples of this tree are located around the

Station Township. Its upper branches are usually white and in contrast with its darker butt.

**Aboriginal uses:** Good firewood. The seeds are eaten raw.



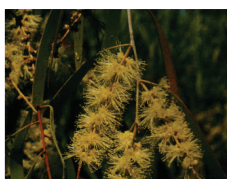
## SWAMP BLOODWOOD

*Eucalyptus ptychocarpa*

Moderate sized tree to 12m high with dense spreading crown and drooping branches. The large, cream or pink flowers appear throughout most of the season and are sought after by nectar eating animals.

Swamp bloodwood is the dominant species along the Emma Gorge walk.

**Aboriginal uses:** The seeds are edible and the leaves are used as an emergency dressing. The sap of the bloodwood is antiseptic.



## WEEPING PAPERBARK

*Melaleuca leucadendra*

The paperbarks and the eucalypts both belong in the Myrtaceae family. Paperbarks are widespread throughout Australia. Its leaves are used to distil tea tree oil. They usually occur in areas which are damp for at

least part of the year. The bark of this species is papery, hence the name. It is also called melaleuca, tea tree or cadjeput. The weeping paperbark is commonly found along watercourses, at the base of Amalia Gorge and along the Pentecost River. Large stands along the Chamberlain River were washed away in the 2002 flood. It grows up to 30m high and its flowers are large and sweet smelling.

**Aboriginal uses:** The bark is used for shelter, bedding and temporary food containers. Fish are wrapped in paperbark and cooked in the coals.



## SICKLE LEAF WATTLE

*Acacia tumida*

The sickle leaf or pindan wattle is a short-lived spreading shrub or tree up to 9m tall. It is common on El Questro and in the dry

season its showy yellow flowers attract nectar feeding animals.

**Aboriginal uses:** The young pods are steamed or eaten raw. They are notorious for causing flatulence and bad breath. Some toxins have been isolated from acacias and experiments with the seeds as food is discouraged.



## SILKY LEAF GREVILLEA

*Grevillea pteridifolia*

This striking tree is common on El Questro, particularly in seasonally wet areas or beside creeks and rivers. It usually grows to 10m high. It flowers around June and due to its appearance is also called Christmas tree.

The brown, woody fruit contains seeds.

**Aboriginal uses:** The showy flowers are steeped in water to extract nectar for drinking. The straight trunk is used for spear shafts. Small bends are straightened by heating the wood over fire and bending it in the opposite direction.



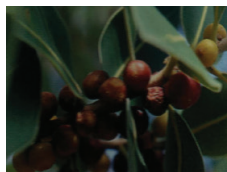
## CLUSTER FIG

*Ficus racemosa*

This fig grows into a very large tree and is commonly found along riverbanks, billabongs and coastal monsoon forests. The fruit becomes reddish-yellow when ripe and is borne in clusters on the trunk and

branches, hence its alternative name of stem fruit fig.

**Aboriginal uses:** The fruit is edible. Dugout canoes are sometimes made from the trunks of these trees.



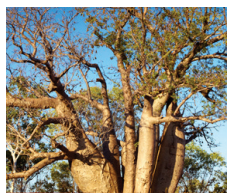
## ROCK FIG

*Ficus platypoda*

Widespread on rocky outcrops and in gullies on hillsides. There are several varieties in the Kimberley, differing mainly on degree of leaf hairiness. Prominent

examples are located in the Chamberlain and El Questro Gorges. An extensive root system penetrates the hard sandstone by way of small cracks. These trees cling to bare rock and survive on very little nutrition. The fruit ripen around July. All fig trees flower inside the actual fruit.

**Aboriginal uses:** The fruits are eaten raw or ground to a paste. According to traditional belief, the fruit if this tree should not be cooked.



## BOAB

*Asansonia gregorii*

The immense, swollen trunks of older trees can measure over 15m in circumference. Radiocarbon dating suggests an age of 1000 years or more in larger trees. The creamy white flowers, which are pollinated

by hawkmoths, appear on the spreading branches after the wet. This tree is deciduous and drops its leaves in the dry. Their closest relatives are six species in Madagascar and one on the African mainland. It has been suggested that seeds arrived in Australia after floating across the Indian Ocean.

**Aboriginal uses:** The root fibres are made into string. The white pith in the fruit tastes similar to dry apple and is eaten raw. The woody fruit capsules are frequently etched or decorated and sold to tourists.

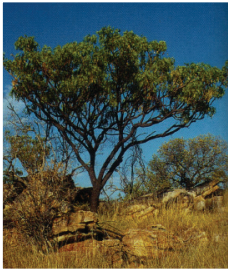


## BAUHINIA

*Lysiphyllum cunninghamii*

The bauhinia is one of the most common trees of the Kimberley. It grows as a dense shrub or semi deciduous tree and its twin leaves are butterfly shaped.

**Aboriginal uses:** The sweet gum and the nectar from the flowers are eaten raw. The roots and bark are used to treat headache and act as a remedy for fever. Bauhinia makes excellent firewood.



## EMU APPLE

*Owenia vernicosa*

This tree is found throughout the region and favours sandy soils in open woodlands. The pendulous fruit hang at the end of branches and turn brown when ripe.

**Aboriginal uses:** The bark is used as a fish poison. Heated leaves relieve sore eyes and headaches. The fruit is considered poisonous to humans.



## FRESHWATER MANGROVE

*Barringtonia acutangula*

Small, often stemmed tree with grouped leaves towards the end of branchlets. This shrub or small tree fringes watercourses like the Pentecost River. The itchy grub commonly found on leaves should not be touched. The pendulous, red flowers appear periodically and are very showy.

**Aboriginal uses:** The pounded bark is used as a fish poison. It also poisons the water.



## IRONWOOD

*Erythrophleum chlorastachys*

A spreading tree 20 m high with a fairly dense crown. It favours open woodland similar to the Emma Gorge walk. All parts of the tree are poisonous to mammals and possibly humans. This timber is very hard and termite resistant.

**Aboriginal uses:** Wood used for spear and harpoon heads. Leaves are used to 'smoke' a person suffering from constipation. Smoke from burning bark is said to be a contraceptive. . . don't rely on it though.



## KAPOK BUSH

*Cochlospermum fraseri*

The kapok bush is often leafless when the large, bright yellow flowers appear. It grows particularly well in sandstone habitats. Within the seed capsules, the seeds are imbedded in white cotton-like hair, hence the alternative name cotton tree. *Aerva*

*javanica* and *Bombax ceoba* are referred to as kapok as well.

**Aboriginal uses:** The roots of young trees are dug up and roasted on coals. Flower petals are eaten raw. The cotton hairs of the seed capsules are used as body decoration.



## STICKY KURRAJONG

*Brachychiton viscidulus*

The large, red flowers of this kurrajong appear in the dry season after the leaves have dropped from the plant. The fruit splits open to display honeycomb-like apartments from which the yellow seeds are shed. It grows as a shrub or tree and favours sandy areas amongst sandstone and basalt rocks.

Kimberley rose is an alternative name for this species as it grows only in the Kimberley. A very similar looking genus, the red flowered kurrajong is also found in the Northern Territory.

**Aboriginal uses:** The seeds are eaten raw or roasted on coals. The tiny hairs on the seeds are highly irritant and need to be burned off before processing. The roots of young plants are eaten raw and the bark is used to make string and rope. The seeds make bland tasting substitute for coffee if roasted and ground.



## LEICHARDT PINE

*Nauclea orientalis*

A large tree with horizontal branching and dense crown. The leaves are dark green and up to 30cm long. It grows along seasonal or permanent watercourses like Jackaroo's Hole on El Questro. The fruit look somewhat like an old, dented golf ball and smell strongly when ripe.

**Aboriginal uses:** The fruit is edible but rather bitter. An infusion of the bark is used to induce vomiting for stomach disorders and also as a fish poison.



## LIVISTONA PALM

*Cracticus nigrogularis*

Several species of livistona palms grow on El Questro, in particular in El Questro Gorge, where it is the dominant tree. The exact species is difficult to determine, even for botanists.

This palm grows up to 15 high with a full, rounded crown. Due to frequent fires, the stem is usually blackened.

**Aboriginal uses:** The growing bud or palm heart is eaten raw or roasted on coals. It has a delicious nutty flavour but harvesting it will kill the palm and is therefore not recommended.



## PANDANUS

*Pandanus spiralis*

A palm like tree up to 10m tall. Trunk narrow and leaf base spirally twisted. The leaves are sword-like and have thorns on the edges and midriff. Bush walkers will recognise this tree immediately when brushing against it. The fruit resembles a wooden pineapple and turns red when ripe. It splits into segments which fall to the ground. This tree is

widespread and favours swamps, billabongs and fringes of floodplains where it often forms large dense stands.

**Aboriginal uses:** An important food plant in the Top End. The kernels inside the fruit segments are eaten raw or lightly roasted. The fruit itself is sucked or chewed for juice. A preparation from the core of the stem is eaten, drunk or applied to treat stomach pain, colds, toothache and ulcers. Pared leaved used for weaving mats, baskets and dilly bags.



## RIVER PANDANUS

*Pandanus aquaticus*

This pandanus species looks very similar to the *Pandanus spiralis*. The leaves are not as distinctly spiralled and the fruit is brown-green with much smaller segments. It always grows close to the water.

**Aboriginal uses:** The fruit is only edible after much preparation. The slender prop roots are used to make long, thick paint brushes and tying rope.



## SPINIFEX

Family *poaceae*

This tussock grass with its many varieties is the dominant species over vast areas of central, northern and western Australia. The leaves are narrow and spiky, thus reducing the exposed surface area of the plant. A variety of different animals shelter in tussocks and some ants live exclusively off spinifex.

**Aboriginal uses:** Spinifex resin is extracted and uses as a glue to fasten spear tips and axe handles. The seeds are ground and mixed with water. This dough is then cooked in clean hot sand.