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Tristania laurina, water gum

Tristania laurina, water gum, is a tree of southeastern coastal Australia, extending from eastern Victoria north into New South Wales and southern Queensland. (Galbraith, Wildflo. S.e. Austr. 264) It is commonly found along streams or in damp situations, as in beds of more or less intermittent streams, hence the common name water gum.

In moist situations trees may reach considerable height, in one locality they were as much as 60 feet (Cochrane, et al p. 155), buttressed and festooned with ipiphytes. In exposed and less favorable localities they grow as a shrub or a small to medium-sized trees. An interesting feature of the tree is its smooth brown bark which peels to expose an attractive smooth white under surface.

The evergreen leaves, glossy above, dull and paler green below, are usually lanceolate, 3-5 inches long by 1/2 to 1 1/4 inches wide, rather stiff and of a heavy texture with obscured veins. Leaves narrow to a short petiole and 1/4 inch long.

The small flowers occur in short clusters of 4-5 in the leaf axils, each flower is about 3/8 inches across. The five petals are bright yellow, the numerous stamens are gathered into 5 groups opposite and about the length of each petal. The rounded capsule, about 3/8 inch across, has numerous small winged seeds.

Tristania laurina is used as a street tree as well as a specimen or park tree in California. In Australia where it is also used as a street tree, the suggestion has been made that it might supplant brush box (*Tristania conferta*) because one pruning will shape its crown and keep it below wires for many years, (Trees for New South Wales, p. 88).

In Australia timber of water gum has been used for small objects, as tool handles, mallets and golf-club heads. The timber is hard, tough, close-grained and fairly light but requires careful seasoning to prevent splitting.

Tristania laurina was an early discovery in Australia by Admiral Phillip, an English explorer and was introduced in 1798 to the gardens at Kew by Joseph Banks. It is a recent introduction into California, perhaps dating back to the 1920's or 1930's. It was among the early plantings in the Strybing Arboretum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park.

In cultivation water gum is slow growing. Trees 8 years old are 10 feet tall and 5 feet across and have a dense and rounded crown. Older trees keep this habit and have a somewhat formal appearance.