

Casuarina equisetifolia

[Synonyms : *Casuarina litorea*, *Casuarina littoralis*]

BEEFWOOD is an evergreen tree. Native to south-eastern Asia, the Pacific and north-eastern Australia, it has tiny greyish-green maturing to greyish-brown cones.

It is also known as *Agóho* (Filipino/Tagalog), Australian beefwood, Australian pine, Beach casuarina, Beach she-oak, Beechwood, *Belati-jhaw* (Bengali), Black oak, Black she-oak, Bull oak, Casuarina, *Casuarine* (Dutch), *Chamara* (Sundanese), *Chavaku* (Tamil), *Chavukku* (Malayalam), *Chemara* (Javanese), *Chowka* (Telugu), Common ru, False ironwood, Horsetail, Horsetail beefwood, Horsetail casuarina, Horsetail oak, Horsetail she-oak, Horsetail tree, Ironwood, *Jangli-saru* (Hindi), *Kana-gaha* (Singhalese), *Karia* (Singhalese), *Kasa-gaha* (Singhalese), *Kasuarine* (German), *Keulenbaum* (German), Mile tree, *Nokonoko* (Fijian), Oak tree, *Pin d'Australie* (French), *Pino Australiano* (Spanish), *Pino maritimo* (Canary Island), Polynesian ironwood, *Prasličník obyčejný* (Slovak), *Přesličník přesličkolistý* (Czech), Queensland swamp oak, Red beefwood, *Ru* (Malay), *Saruku* (Telugu), *Savukku* (Tamil), *Serwe* (Tamil), She-oak, Sheoke, Shingle oak, Shortleaf ironwood, *Son tale* (Thai), South sea ironwood, *Sura* (Marathi), Swamp oak, Swamp she-oak, *Toa* (Samoan and Tongan), Weeping willow, Whistling pine, and Willow.

The flowers are wind-pollinated, and some of the fruits are distributed by the sea.

Beefwood can produce copious pollen which can cause hay fever.

Equisetifolia is derived from the genus name *Equisetum* and Latin *-folia* (leaved) components meaning 'like plants in that (horsetail) genus'.

The name Beefwood reflects the colour of the wood.

Some authorities have noted that birds seem to dislike the tree.

Not only is beefwood cultivated as hedging, or windbreaks, but it has also been pointed out that it lends itself to the topiarist's art. It is used particularly in China, India and Mauritius in shoreline reclamation (to stabilise drifting sand).. The trees are often cultivated for their shade on vanilla plantations (*Vanilla planifolia*) in South America because they can condense the humid air on their twigs (and it has been noted in the Sao Paulo district in Brazil that the ground beneath them is always damp). But authorities do voice strong reservations as they point out that when the needle-like branchlets fall any vegetation beneath is killed

In contrast in Florida (southern United States) where beefwood has been grown to provide windbreaks for some of the citrus groves there and has become naturalized, the trees have overwhelmed some of the beaches. This has upset the natural environment not least to the extent that there are now insufficient resting sites for the local alligators and turtles. In other parts of the world, including Pakistan, it has been introduced especially for its sand-binding properties and has become invasive.

In the past in its natural home the hard wood was fashioned into weapons such as spears, clubs, or boomerangs. It has also been used for poles, yokes, masts, cartwheels and piling.

Today it provides material for roof shingles, fencing and fuel (especially in India and Mauritius). When burnt, the wood gives off great heat and is used both domestically and industrially. It also yields a good charcoal and provides wood pulp. The wood has also

been found to be useful on vanilla (*Vanilla planifolia*) plantations where it serves as vine supports – and it is used on a commercial scale for making furniture.

The bark is sometimes used locally for tanning and yields a pale reddish-brown colour. It has also been used on the island of Seram in Indonesia for toughening fishing lines.

On what may be considered a less pragmatic note, the sap or resin is said to have been used in parts of Malaysia to treat people possessed by elephant spirits.

Medicinally, the bark has been valued in India for the treatment of dysentery and diarrhoea. It has also been used in local remedies for the vitamin B deficiency known as beriberi. The leaves have been employed in cures for indigestion. Twigs have been taken in decoction for wind and applied externally on swellings, and in powdered form they have been put on facial pimples.