

*Eucalyptus*

*Myrtaceae*

*Eucalyptus* is derived from Greek *eu-* (well, good) and *calypto-* (covered) components with reference to the lid-like covering over the stamens (operculum) dropped as the flower opens.

[In the 1780s L'Héritier became involved in the Dombey affair (see *Lapageria rosea*) and caused some considerable controversy in the botanical world.]

Warning – the extracted oil from these species (which can vary dramatically in potency) can be fatal if an overdose is ingested.

Eucalyptus wood has been the traditional source of timber for building in Australia and various eucalyptus species have been introduced to other countries with similar climate for the same purpose. In addition this hardwood from Australia or Brazil is used in making car interiors. The wood also offers a valuable source of fuel as these species grow so quickly. When the local trees in the region around Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, had all been cut down for fuel a serious situation was averted when the eucalyptus was planted in their stead. Its rapid growth enabled a more stable fuel supply to be established within a few years.

Eucalyptus oil extracted from the leaves of some species was first exported from Australia in 1788.

Australia owes the major impetus for these diverse applications and the consequent economic advantages to one of her Directors of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, Sir Ferdinand Müller (1825-1896), a German botanist and explorer who was Director there from 1857-1873. He is responsible for identifying and promoting some invaluable eucalyptus qualities and introducing various species to Africa, the Americas and southern Europe.

Medicinally, eucalyptus was thought at one time to be beneficial in curing malaria and for that reason was grown extensively in malarial areas. However the value of the introduction of these species to these sites was not confined to their antiseptic qualities. The roots helped to dry out the soil and it is understood that within 5 years of planting the areas in question were not only clear of fever but marsh as well.