

Nothofagus cunninghamii

[Synonyms : *Fagus cunninghamii*]

MYRTLE BEECH is a deciduous or evergreen tree. Native to south-eastern Australia and to Tasmania, it has fan-shaped sprays of small glossy dark green leaves that are bronze when young.

It is also known as Antarctic beech, Myrtle, Tasmanian beech, Tasmanian myrtle, and Tasmanian southern beech.

The flowers are pollinated by wind.

Cunninghamii commemorates a British (probably Scottish) surgeon, naturalist and trader, James Cunningham or Cunninghame (fl. 1698- c.1709), who served with the British East India Company in China from 1698 to 1705. His voyage out to the Chinese station in the Taiwan Strait at Amoy (better known now as Xiamen) in 1698 as an East India Company surgeon was interrupted in the Canary Islands when the crew were imprisoned and the ship was impounded. Cunningham spent the time collecting plant specimens there – as he did when the journey was resumed and the ship reached Batavia (now Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia), as well as during stops on the homeward passage in 1699 and the subsequent outward journey to the Far East the next year (stops in Malacca, the South African Cape, Ascension Island and St. Helena).. He stayed two years in Chusan (today more familiar as Zhoushan) from 1700 then he moved to Cochinchina (southern Vietnam, south-east of Cambodia) where from 1703-1705 he was supposed to compete, on behalf of the East India Company, with the Chinese for trade. But he was unsuccessful and authorities suspect his primary interest was collecting plants. Records indicate he was the only European to survive a massacre in 1705 then found himself in prison for the following two years. In 1707 he was freed and travelled to Batavia (Jakarta) where he remained a few days before beginning his journey home – and authorities believe he died at sea. While in China, despite restrictions on his movements, he developed extensive collections (botanical, and other artefacts such as Chinese drawings of plants), sent plants home to Europe to his peers, and made plant descriptions and drawings, as well as notes on their habitat, plant uses and practises (including cultivation of tea), and local names. His notes on agriculture in Chusan were published in The Royal Society's Philosophical Transactions. He was a Fellow of The Royal Society.

The fairly hard, pinkish-brown wood has been used for many purposes ranging from veneering and turning generally to making (more specifically) railway carriages, car frames, interior panelling, flooring and furniture, as well as smaller items such as cogs, wheels or shoe lasts.