

Blackwood acacia

Acacia melanoxylon Br.

Legume family (Leguminosae)

Post-Cook introduction

Blackwood acacia, or Australian blackwood, is an evergreen tree introduced in forestry tests and as an ornamental. It differs from the native koa, *Acacia koa*, in that its “leaves” are shorter and less curved, and its pods are narrow and curved. Mimosa subfamily (Mimosoideae).

Medium-sized tree 40 ft (12 m) high and 1 ft (0.3 m) in trunk diameter. In southeastern Australia, where it is native, this acacia is a large tree to 80–110 ft (24–30 m) in height and 2½–4 ft (0.8–1.2 m) in diameter. With straight axis, erect branches, and regular narrow crown of dense foliage. Bark gray, rough, finely furrowed. Twigs slender, slightly angled, with tiny pressed hairs, brownish.

Leaves alternate, modified as sickle-shaped flattened leafstalks or petioles (phyllodes) narrowly sickleshaped or lance-shaped, slightly curved, 2½–4½ inches (6–12 cm) long and ¾–¾ inch (1–2 cm) wide, thickened and leathery, hairless, long-pointed at both ends, with dotlike gland near almost stalkless base, with 3–6 fine parallel veins from base, dull green. Leaves of young plants (juvenile) are compound (bipinnate), to 5 inches (13 cm) long, with 4–10 pairs of branches, each with 15–20 pairs of oblong thin dull green leaflets ¾–½ inch (10–13 mm) by ⅛ inch (3 mm).

Flower clusters (racemes) of 3–5 short-stalked light yellow balls (heads) ¾–½ inch (10–13 mm) in diameter at leaf base. Flowers tiny, 30–50 stalkless in ball, consisting of cup-shaped 5-toothed calyx, corolla to 5 narrow petals united in lower part, many spreading thread like separate stamens ¼–⅓ inch (6–8 mm) long, ending in dot anther, and narrow pistil with hairy one-celled ovary and threadlike style.

Fruits (pods) oblong, narrow, 3–5 inches (7.5–13 cm) long and less than ¾ inch (1 cm) broad, flat with thick borders, reddish brown, curved and twisted. Seeds 6–10, beanlike elliptical, ⅓ inch (5 mm) long, shiny black, hanging and encircled by red ringlike stalk.

The wood is golden brown to dark brown, sometimes tinged or streaked with red, with a beautiful figure very similar to koa. It is hard, moderately heavy,

moderately strong and durable, works easily, turns well, and takes a high polish. The wood has been compared with black walnut, as has koa.

Known as blackwood or “hickory,” this species is one of the most ornamental Australian timbers, used principally for cabinetwork, paneling, also veneer, split staves, and furniture. Wood of five trees grown at Kokee, Kauai, was tested in 1966 and found to be similar in density and appearance to koa, but with a somewhat higher shrinkage in drying.

Propagated from seed, also by root sprouts. Relatively slow growing. Elsewhere planted as a street tree and ornamental, though not recommended for Hawaii for these purposes because of root suckering problem. Introduced also in California where it grows very well as a street tree. A total of 17,000 trees was planted in the Forest Reserves before 1960. Since 1960 several large plantings have been made in the Waiakea Forest Reserve on Hawaii, but the trees there are slow growing.

Special area

Kokee

Champion

Height 78 ft (23.8 m), c.b.h. 8.2 ft (2.5 m), spread 57 ft (17.4 m). Kokee State Park, Kauai (1968).

Range

Native of southeastern Australia

Other common names

Australia blackwood, blackwood, black acacia



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Twig with phyllodes and flowers, twig with phyllode and compound leaf (left), and fruit (lower right), 1 X (Maiden).