

## Stop 382 Adult Tour – Eucalyptus, Cool Temperate House

More than two-thirds of Australia's vegetation is comprised of several hundred species of the beautiful eucalyptus. Growing in almost every habitat throughout Australia, from snowy mountains to tropical rainforests, the eucalyptus has become linked to the land down under. But these rather adaptable trees are also found in New Guinea and the Philippines. This adaptability has resulted in many eucalyptus species becoming invasive plant pests when introduced to areas outside their native habitat.

Eucalyptus trees go through what is known as a 'phase change' as they mature. Leaves on most juvenile trees are silvery and round, like the ones you find in a dried flower arrangement. When trees reach adulthood, the new leaves are long like those on a weeping willow. While highly poisonous to most other animals, eucalyptus leaves are the exclusive food of the koala bear, which has developed immunity to the toxins.

The essential oil in eucalyptus leaves is used as the base for many cough drops and chest rubs. But that *same* oil when it's contained in piles of dried leaves, can fuel an intensely raging fire on the floor of a eucalyptus grove. Fortunately, many eucalyptus species have adapted remarkably well to fire. Their thick bark protects the tree's core from damage, and following a huge burn, heat induced chemical changes will cause the eucalyptus to sprout new shoots. In addition, heat-fanned winds disperse the eucalyptus seeds over great distances allowing the species to expand its range.