

# What Type of Eucalyptus is it?

*contributed by B. Bennett*



You might love them or love them less than other trees but for better or worse the adopted symbol of Scripps Ranch would seem to be the Eucalyptus. There are at least 500 species of Eucalyptus and likely more than 800 subspecies. This diversity make can make it challenging to identify a particular tree type which may require a detailed analysis of leaves, flowers and fruit pods. However, I have seen the shoulder shrugs and heard the guesses for the eucalypts we have here in Scripps Ranch. So, I set out to describe in layman's terms, some of those seen most often and most easily identified.

## Sugar gum

### *Eucalyptus cladocalyx*

This is our signature tree in Scripps Ranch. It is the tree that welcomes us home on the I-15 between Pomerado Rd and Mira Mesa Blvd. It is by far our most common Eucalyptus and also our most visible because of its height (up to 120 feet) and that it fills much of our open space. The trunk is mostly smooth, white to gray but mottled with patches of orange and brown and with frequent pits and vertical cracks. These cracks can ooze a sweet sap which in summer attracts bees and the large green June beetles. Lower branches tend to grow upwards more than horizontally out from the trunk. Flowers are small and creamy white. New leaves shine red/orange at the end of high branches. Pool owners near sugar gum will be all too familiar with the small barrel shaped seed pods that clog the first filter.

## Red ironbark

### *Eucalyptus sideroxylon*

This may be our second most common Eucalyptus and is often found growing among the groves of sugar gum. But it is not as tall, rarely exceeding 50 feet here. It is distinctive because the bark is almost black, rough and furrowed, does not peel and secretes a red gummy sap, called kino. Small flowers are usually pink or red but there are white flowered forms here as well. There is an easy to see stand of young red ironbarks on the northwest corner of Avenida Magnifica and Pomerado Rd.

## Lemon scented gum

### *Corymbia citriodora*

After 150 years as a Eucalyptus, this tree was recently re-classified in the genus Corymbia but it looks, acts and smells like a Eucalyptus so let's just say it still is. Some would say it is our most beautiful. The trunk is smooth and almost pure white or with a slight pink copper sheen at certain times during the year. Where the major branches connect you may see human-like wrinkles. This tree can grow over 100 feet tall but typically in Scripps Ranch they are not that high. The end branches and leaves on smaller trees can have a "weepy" appearance and as the name suggests the crushed leaf smells of citrus. A number of these trees can be seen at the entrance to SRSRC at Aviary, the north section of Businesspark Ave, and outside the Carl's Jr restaurant beside I-15.

Silver dollar gum

*Eucalyptus polyanthemos*

This is a hardy tree that is very drought tolerant. Leaves have a blue-gray hue and while almost round on saplings become pear-shaped or elongated on adult trees. *E. polyanthemos* can grow up to 70 feet and typically has a rounded and fuller canopy than the 3 species already described. The bark is gray, rough and fibrous but not deeply furrowed. Flowers are quite small, white and tightly clustered. Look along Ironwood Rd or Tribuna Ave or the corner of Ashlar Pl.

Yellow gum

*Eucalyptus leucoxydon*

Closest in appearance to *E. cladocalyx* among the trees described in this article. The key differences being the bark and color of the flowers. These are moderately tall trees with many classic Eucalyptus features which can make them less distinctive. The upper bark is smooth, white and not as fissured as *E. cladocalyx*. The lower bark around the base of the tree is quite different appearing grey and rough like *E. polyanthemos*. The leaves are grey-green, long and narrow. The flowers are typically pink-red although at least one variety has white flowers. Several specimens can be seen along the shore of Miramar lake as you walk the circuit trail.

Red-flowered gum

*Corymbia ficifolia*

Another *Corymbia* that comes and goes from the genus, *Eucalyptus*, but this one looks quite different from *C. citriodora*. *C. ficifolia* is a spreading tree of small to moderate height that can be covered with large seasonal blooms of coral, pink, orange or red depending on the variety. Most distinctive and defining are the almost ping-pong ball sized, urn-shaped seed pods. Spot one on the corner of Ancona and Sunset Ridge.

Bushy yate

*Eucalyptus conferruminata*

A small spreading tree most notable because the woody seed pods are fist-sized with pointed chambers resembling the head of a mace. Each chamber is closed by a tri-cuspid type lid. Flowers are lemon yellow and comparatively large. There are

a couple specimens near Hendrix pond and also at Nancy Park on the far side of Miramar lake.

Rainbow gum or Mindanao gum

*Eucalyptus deglupta*

Native to the southern Philippines and Indonesia, holiday travelers may have seen it in Hawaii. This is an uncommon tree in Scripps Ranch but it is distinctive and worth knowing about and could prove increasingly popular although it prefers consistent watering or a damp hollow. The leaf is a glossy green but it is the trunk that really attracts attention. Freshly peeled strips of bark reveal a vivid lime green patch of trunk that changes to orange then dull purple and then gray. At any one time a trunk may display all of these colors which makes a striking show. There are half a dozen small trees on Sunset Ridge between Ancona and Canarywood. A larger reference specimen is located about 50 yards to the right of the San Diego Zoo entrance.

Swamp Mahogany

*Eucalyptus robusta*

As its name suggests this tree prefers damp soils and so is not common in Scripps Ranch. In its native Australia it is a valued tree for humans (timber), bats (fruit) koalas (leaves). Its distinctive traits are its leaves; glossy dark green that are proportionately wider than most Eucalyptus, its bark; thick red-brown on the entire trunk, furrowed and spongy when wet, and the seed pods; 4 to 7 cup-shaped pods all fused directly to a stem (peduncle) with each small pod having 3-5 chambers. There are a couple specimens growing in amongst the Mindanao gum described previously.

Flooded Gum

*Eucalyptus grandis*

A tall, straight tree with smooth surface trunk that is mostly white and a little chalky when touched. It may also have patches of dark green on the trunk where it looks like the white has been rubbed off. Notches on the trunk may weep an orange sap that stains the trunk vertically. The very base of the trunk may have a patch of grey rough bark. Unlike *E. cladocalyx* the branches typically come off from the trunk at a 90 degree angle. There are a few of these trees to the right of the entrance at Lake View Park on Mira Lago Terrace.

## Unknown Eucalyptus

There are a couple specimens of a Eucalyptus that I have not been able to assuredly identify. One specimen is beside Hoyt Park Dr at the far end of the open lot. The other is nearby, opposite the high school softball field on Scripps Ranch Blvd between Meanley Dr and Scripps Lake. The trees have long strips of bark hanging from all branches. Perhaps it is the Manna gum, *E. viminalis*? If you do identify this or some other Eucalyptus species and want to tell, do email and let me know what and where.

Unknown eucalyptus. Could it be *E. viminalis*?



There are also a few tree species present in Scripps Ranch that look like they could be Eucalyptus but are not. Perhaps this is because they are indeed part of the same greater family, *Myrtaceae*. *Melaleuca sp.* have white papery bark and were used as an original landscape tree in the front yards of many homes in Scripps Ranch. Another tree that is being planted more and more often in parks and along roadsides is the Brisbane Box, *Tristania conferta* or *Lophostemon confertus*. It has a pink-beige trunk with bright green leaves all year and because they do not shed many leaves and branches and are drought tolerant, they are being favored by the city.