

BLUE GUM EUCALYPTUS

Eucalyptus globulus

Myrtle Family (Myrtaceae)

DESCRIPTION

Blue gum eucalyptus is found throughout California, particularly in cooler coastal areas. It requires moist soils, access to shallow groundwater, or coastal fog drip.

Blue gum frequently reaches 100 feet or more in height. The smooth, straight trunk can grow to a diameter of 7 feet or more. The pale gray-brown bark peels in long, papery strips to expose a smooth, pale yellow sub-surface. Mature leaves are alternate, lance- or sickle-shaped, and 4–10 inches long. They have a leathery texture and are dull green with a yellow primary vein. In contrast, juvenile leaves are opposite, shorter, and more oval in shape. They are waxy and bluish green, and are nearly sessile (with very short petioles) on sharply squared branches. The bluish green leaves give the blue gum its common name, and the drooping foliage together with the peeling bark and irregular crown give blue gum a distinctive appearance. Blue gum is distinguished from red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) by having wider leaves and larger fruits.

REPRODUCTION

Blue gum reproduces both from seed and vegetatively from roots and stumps. Dormant buds produce new shoots from the base of a cut stump. At 4–5 years of age blue gum starts to produce yellowish white flowers, about 2 inches wide, between December and May. These develop into fruits almost a year later. The fruit is a conical, woody capsule roughly 1 inch across. It contains numerous dark brown seeds, which are wind-dispersed and capable of germinating within a few weeks.



IMPACT

Blue gum can form monospecific stands through superior competition for moisture from the soil and water table and by establishing a dense layer of bark and leaf litter on the ground. Blue gum leaves contain phenolic compounds that are thought to alter soil chemistry and inhibit the germination of native plant species. With their abundant leaf litter, peeling strips of bark, and volatile oils in the leaves, blue gum stands are highly flammable, as was witnessed in the Oakland Hills fire of 1991.

KEY FACTORS

- u Vigorously resprouts from cut stumps.
- u Seed longevity not known.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Given its sheer size and persistence, blue gum eucalyptus can be very difficult to control. Removing larger trees is dangerous and often requires a professional arborist. However, blue gum can be temporarily managed by containment until volunteer groups have the resources to remove larger trees and stands. The goal of containment is to keep trees from spreading by removing those on the perimeter of the stands.

- u **Pull** small saplings by hand or with a Weed Wrench.
- u **Cut and treat.** Cut the stump flat and as low to the ground as possible. Practitioners report using a 25–50 percent dilution of glyphosate. Herbicide must be applied within 5 minutes, and preferably within 1 minute after cutting, while the cambium can still transport the herbicide into the roots. Some people find that the higher the cut is made above the main stem, the greater the chance of resprouts growing below the cut.
- u **Cut and cover.** Mature trees up to 8 inches diameter at breast height can typically be cut with a hand saw. Larger trees require a chain-saw. Cover the cut trunk and the surrounding ground 3 feet out from the base of the trunk with landscape fabric and leave for 6–12 months. Check periodically to ensure that the fabric is still tightly secured.
- u **Cut and grind or macerate.**

DISPOSAL

Blue gum eucalyptus can be cut for firewood, but when burned it can deposit oily soot in the chimney. Allowing the wood to dry thoroughly makes it easier and cleaner to burn. The wood hardens as it ages, becoming exceptionally difficult to cut, so cutting for firewood should be done within 2 weeks of felling the tree.

FOLLOW-UP

Check for resprouts for at least 3 years or more. Those using herbicide cut any resprouts at the base and treat the cambium a second time, or cut the entire stump and treat again. If a new shoot originates from a point high on the stump, the stump can be cut below it, but if the shoot sprouts from near the ground or from roots, it must be cut and treated directly.

INTERESTING FACTS

Native to Australia and Tasmania, blue gum was introduced to California as an ornamental in the 1850s, and was then widely planted for timber, windbreaks, and fuel. Its timber proved unpopular as it twists in the drying process. Nevertheless, blue gum eucalyptus makes good firewood and paper pulp. Glands on the leaves produce the volatile eucalyptus oil, which can be used as a decongestant. The smell is similar to that of camphor or menthol.

Notes