



1. Habit with much-branched upper parts. 2. Large leaves borne on long stalks. 3. Leaf scars on branches and glands at base of leaf stalks. 4. Clusters of yellow male flower spikes.



Mexican Bean Tree (*Cecropia peltata*)

Introduced

Class I

Mexican Bean Tree, or Trumpet Tree, is a plant from tropical America that is occasionally cultivated in gardens in the warmer parts of Australia. However, this species is very invasive and is thought to be a serious threat to our rainforest ecosystems.

Distribution

Mexican Bean Tree has become locally naturalised in the Mission Beach and Clifton Beach areas in northern Queensland. *Cecropia* trees have also been recorded in the Mossman area and northern suburbs of Cairns, but these may have been closely related species. Numerous cultivated specimens, and potentially also some naturalised infestations, have also recently been reported from the wetter parts of south-eastern Queensland and north-eastern NSW.

Description

Mexican Bean Tree is a fast growing tree that reaches up to 20 m or more in height. Each tree normally produces a single main trunk with significant branching only in its upper parts. Its stems are often hollow, sometimes containing ant nests, and its trunks are covered with relatively smooth pale grey bark. Prominent leaf scars are present on the younger branches. The very large leaves resemble those of a paw-paw plant and are alternately arranged along the stems. They are borne on long stalks and have several deep lobes with wavy margins that spread outwards like the fingers on a hand. The leaf undersides are pale and finely hairy while the upper surfaces are darker green and rough to the touch. At the base of each leaf stalk is a swollen area that has a mass of glands where ants feed.

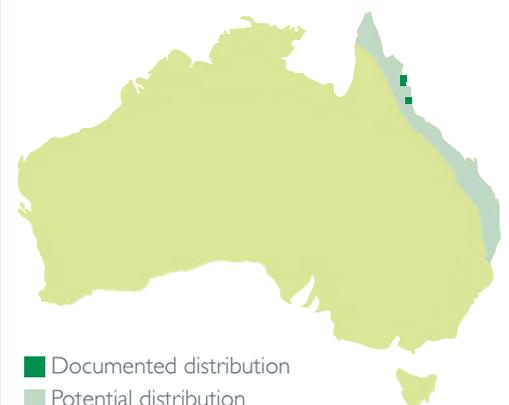
Separate male and female flower clusters are produced on different plants, and do not have any obvious petals. Male flowers are yellow and produced on elongated spikes (up to 6 cm long), with 15-25 of these spikes clustered together at the end of a short flowering branch. Female flowers are similar, but are greenish in colour, produced in longer spikes (up to 9 cm long) and have 2-4 spikes in each cluster. The fruit are cylindrical in shape and actually made up of numerous tiny fleshy fruit (3-4 mm long). Each of the tiny fruitlets has a sweet flesh around many small seeds.

Quick Facts

- > A tree usually growing about 20 m tall
- > Leaves are borne on long stalks that have a mass of glands at the base
- > These leaves are very large and have several deep lobes
- > Male and female flower spikes are produced on different plants

Habitat

This species is a potential weed of rainforests, riparian vegetation, urban bushland, forestry plantations and forest margins. It is of most concern in tropical regions, but may also have some potential as a weed in sub-tropical regions.





1. Leaf with deeply-lobed margins. 2. Close-up of smooth grey trunk.

Reproduction and Dispersal

Mexican Bean Tree reproduces mainly by seed, though it may also produce suckers from its shallow roots. Seeds are widely dispersed by birds, bats and other animals that eat the fleshy fruit. Individual plants can also quickly develop into colonies, through the production of root suckers.

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

This species is thought to have the potential to invade rainforest ecosystems, causing serious damage to our natural forests. It has the ability to quickly occupy forest gaps and form dense stands in natural vegetation, especially after natural or artificial disturbance events. It is already a serious problem in other parts of the world, including tropical Africa, south-eastern Asia and some Pacific islands.

Control Methods

As all *Cecropia* species are Class 1 declared weeds, all efforts are being made to eradicate Mexican Bean Tree from Queensland, including the removal of all cultivated specimens. Biosecurity Queensland has produced a pest alert *Cecropia* species (which can be downloaded from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries website at www.daff.qld.gov.au) and is working closely with local governments on its management. If you see this plant please call Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

Seedlings and very young saplings can be removed by hand, but care must be taken to remove the root system, as root suckers are known to be produced by this species. Large plants can be controlled with herbicides using the cut stump or stem injection method. In Queensland, some products (e.g. Access, Garlon 600, Tordon DS and Grazon DS) can be used to control woody environmental weeds such as Mexican Bean Tree via the APVMA off-label permit number 11463 (<http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PER11463.PDF>). Please read this permit carefully prior to use and, unless otherwise stated in this permit, the use of these products must be in accordance with the instructions on their labels. Best practice is to leave the plant waste on site for decomposition, as this will minimise the chance of spreading seeds. The site and surrounding areas should also be regularly monitored for seedling recruitment.

However, it is important that you contact your local council or Biosecurity Queensland before treating Mexican Bean Tree – as it will aid efforts by authorities to co-ordinate the eradication of this species.

The control methods referred to in Weed Watch™ should be used in accordance with the restrictions (federal and state legislation and local government laws) directly or indirectly related to each control method. These restrictions may prevent the utilisation of one or more of the methods referred to, depending on individual circumstances. While every care is taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, Technigro does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.

This information has been developed with the assistance of Dr Sheldon Navie. Photographs are also courtesy of Dr Sheldon Navie © Technigro Australia Pty Ltd 2013

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Look a-likes

Mexican Bean Tree is extremely similar to several other *Cecropia* species, and there is some confusion as to which species are actually present in Australia. It is also relatively similar to Rice-paper Plant (*Tetrapanax papyrifer*), which can be distinguished by its smaller shrubby habit and large much-branched clusters of tiny white flowers and black fruit.



Top. Shrubby habit of Rice-paper Plant.

Bottom. Large clusters of tiny black fruit.