

Why I fell in love with the Eucalyptus tree

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Fire can be damaging to several plants. But eucalypts embrace it. Today, Eucalyptus trees are one of the most widely cultivated around the world



Eucalypts encompass 7 allied genera of woody plants. Where fire can be damaging to several plants, eucalypts thrive, embracing it in their growth and reproductive cycles. (Unsplash)

A kookaburra sits on an old gum tree, watching as orange-blue flames flicker in the distance. Peppermints, stringybarks, mottled gum trees stand to attention as the air crackles, heavy with foreboding. The forest floor is heavy with organic litter and their bark peelings, perfect fuel for the wildfire advancing rapidly. The wind picks up in the east, aglow with what seems to be a floating candle. When it comes into view, its blurry details sharpen into a 4ft-long curled, hollow tube of flaming bark from a ribbon gum burning 20km away. As it nears, a stringybark's peeling trunk snatches the baton of fire, which sprints up into the tree, spreading from branch to canopy, reaching for the kookaburra in its gum tree. It flees as black smoke chokes the bush.

Australian landscapes, biodiversity and fire are deeply interconnected. As Victor Steffensen puts it in his book, *Fire Country*: "...nature has created the balance of no-fire and fire-dependent systems to provide tolerance and courtesy between them through fire." No strangers to this fiery rapport are the eucalypts.

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