

Messmate Forests Factsheet

Department of
Sustainability and
Environment

Trees and Forests

ISSN 1440 2262

Messmate forests have a wide distribution and occur in southern, central and eastern Victoria where they are found in hilly or mountainous country.



Where Messmate forests grow in Victoria

The dominant tree species are eucalypts, with Messmate Stringybark (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) the most common. Messmates are tall trees which grow between 40 to 70 metres. Messmates prefer a sunny position and well drained soils. The trunk is straight with dark, reddish brown bark. Messmates have curved glossy green leaves. White flowers appear between December - March.

Other canopy species in Messmate forests include, Narrow-leaf Peppermint (*E. radiata*), Broad-leaf Peppermint (*E. dives*), Manna Gum (*E. viminalis*) and Candlebark (*E. rubida*). The understorey typically includes Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), Prickly Moses (*A. verticillata*), Larger-leaf Bushpea (*Pultenaea daphnoides*), Forest Wire-Grass (*Tetrarrhena juncea*) and a variety of fern species.

Messmate forests have a multi layered structure. The ground cover is often dense comprising grasses, ferns and low shrubs.

Messmate forests provide shelter, food and nesting sites for a diverse range of native animals.

The multi-layered structure of these forests provides habitat for a number of bird species. Honeyeaters feed on the nectar and pollen of flowering plants. Treecreepers feed on insects living under the bark of eucalypts. The Golden Whistler and Grey Fantail are common on smaller shrubs searching for insects.



Birds such as thornbills, whistlers and treecreepers can be spotted searching for insects found under the bark of eucalypt trees. Larger birds such as the Laughing Kookaburra, Crimson Rosella and the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo utilise tree hollows for nest sites.

In the evening, nocturnal marsupials such as Common Ringtail Possums, Sugar Gliders and Greater Gliders move through the canopy in search of gum, fruit and leaves.



On the ground the Common Wombat searches for grass, tubers and roots. Brown Antechinus and Bush Rats are also common mammals of the understorey. A number of bat species utilise tree hollows for roosting. Skinks, Blue-tongue Lizards and Tiger Snakes generally take advantage of the more open areas to bask in the sun during the warmer months.

Messmate forests provided Aboriginal nations with a range of resources. Bark from eucalypts was used for shelters and many woven items such as baskets, bags and fish nets. The sap from Manna gums was added to water to make a refreshing drink and pelts from possums, and feathers from emus were turned into cloaks and rugs.



Messmate Stringybark tree

Messmate – Trees and Forests

Food gathering was a major part of the Aboriginal people's activities. They possessed extensive knowledge of the breeding and migratory patterns of animals as well as the cycles of flowering and fruiting plants. The nations' seasonal journeys to maximise food collection continued until the arrival of the early European settlers.

For the early European settlers Messmate forests provided what seemed an endless supply of timber and fuel to support the expanding needs of the population.

Timber Production

Messmate is one of the most valuable timber trees in Victoria. The wood is pale brown to brown in colour with clearly defined annual growth rings. It is straight grained with moderate hardness and strength.

Messmate has a wide range of construction and manufacturing uses, including house framing, joinery, flooring, furniture and interior finishes. It is also used in pulp production for paper making.

Shelterwood is a harvesting method sometimes used in Messmate forests. This system involves harvesting trees in two stages over a 10-20 year time frame. It is used in more open forests where new tree seedlings can grow under partially shaded conditions.

The shelterwood system is used so that the trees remaining after the first cut can put on an additional 10-20 years of growth before being harvested. After the first cut the remaining trees grow quite vigorously as they have less competition for water and nutrients because the more dominant trees have been removed.

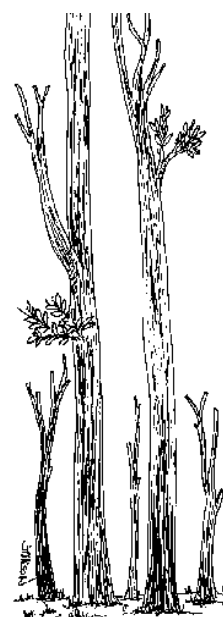
Fire

Fire is a natural part of the environment and over millions of years Australian forests have developed a range of survival mechanisms. Before human settlement of Australia, lightning storms were responsible for burning large areas of forest. As a consequence, eucalypts and acacias, due to their ability to survive and regenerate after a fire, began to dominate the landscape.

It is estimated that Aboriginal people arrived in Australia at least 40,000 years ago. They used fire for hunting, cooking, to flush out animals, to encourage seed production, for improving access through the bush and for warmth. Early European settlers used fire to promote new growth, to assist in land clearing and in the search for gold.

As settlement continued bushfires and their destructive nature became a major concern. A bushfire is any unplanned fire. Surface or ground bushfires burn the litter and understorey plants but do not reach the top of taller trees. Crown bushfires burn through the top of trees. These are large fires with flames reaching high above the ground.

Epicormic buds



Some eucalypts such as Messmate and Stringybarks may survive a bushfire because they are protected by their thick fibrous bark. Many eucalypts are highly adapted to fire; having the ability to send up shoots from lignotubers below the ground and from dormant buds (epicormic buds) on the trunks and branches. However, other eucalypts such as Mountain Ash are fire sensitive. Fires of only moderate intensity are capable of killing or severely damaging mature trees.

Published by the Victorian Government Department of Sustainability and Environment
Melbourne, June 2006 © The State of Victoria Department of Sustainability and Environment 2006
This publication is copyright. No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*.
Authorised by the Victorian Government, 8 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne.

ISSN 1440-2262
For more information contact:
Kathy Overton
Statewide Forest Education Co-ordinator
Department of Sustainability and Environment
Level 3, 8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne 3002
Ph. (03) 9412 4630 Fax. (03) 9637 8589

Visit DSE's website
www.dse.vic.gov.au
then select 'Forestry'

This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.