

## **Australian Eucalypts which teach us about our world.**

To illustrate her philosophy to OBSERVE what is going on around us, Frances Bodkin, an Indigenous Education officer at Mt Annan Botanic Gardens, talked about the Eucalypt. It is truly remarkable:

### **Eucalypt types**

There are seven different types of Eucalyptus/related gum trees (the 7 Warriors of Dreamtime stories). These are arranged by their uses and their bark as follows:

- \* Stringybarks - firestarters
- \* Mugga - Ironbarks, shelter for all creatures
- \* Spotted Gum - peacemaker - makes a good club
- \* Bayali - Part bark, the smooth bark falls in ribbons. It is a medicine tree. The sap or leaves treat a wide variety of ailments from pain relief to blood clotting, asthma and even skin wrinkles!
- \* Scaly bark - Yellow and Grey Boxes - weapons, straight flying spears.
- \* Boona - peacemaker - trap evil spirits
- \*Peppermints - Gastric medicine. Boil up leaves to treat food poisoning, tummy upsets, morning sickness etc

### **Eucalypts can tell you when it's about to rain.**

A sweet-smelling Eucalypt tells us that it will rain in 2 days. They produce sap (the sweet smell), which acts as a wetting agent. As the rain falls, it washes the sap down to the base of the tree where it froths, taking the water deep into the soil. Remove eucalypts and you will find there is more runoff and less groundwater.

### **Eucalypts are communal creatures**

They need companions to help hold branches up. You will find that a solitary Eucalypt will drop more branches than one in a group. They will warn you though- with about 20 minutes of creaks and groans.

### **Eucalypts communicate**

If one Eucalypt in a group is attacked by a fungus or disease, the other Eucalypts will produce a hormone to help fight off the disease.

### **Eucalypts protect their young.**

Eucalypts flower and seed every year, but the seed is viable only every 4 or 5 years. In viable years, the Eucalypt produces a hormone, which kills its competitors to allow Eucalypt seedlings to grow unheeded. So observe the ground under Eucalypts after flowering time. If there is healthy undergrowth, you may collect and eat the seed. If the ground is more bare than usual, leave the seed alone, and enjoy watching the little seedlings burst through the bare earth.

### **Eucalypts can become dormant.**

They may appear to be dead, but drought or shock can produce a lasting dormancy. If they feel cool to touch, they are still pulling water up from the soil and are not dead. An extraordinary example of this exists at Mt Annan. A Grey Box was recorded dead in 1798, and used as a marker tree by early explorers. Because of its heritage significance it was not cut down. Then amazingly in 2000, it sprouted a branch.

**Eucalypts can win battles for you.**

The epicornic growth of a Eucalypt, when thrown on the fire of your enemy will make people near the fire sick, and easily overcome in battle.

**Conclusion**

So the message is, go out regularly into your garden or into local bushland. Allow all your senses to react. Make notes of the things you observe, and look for patterns and relationships that may become important. Once you understand what you see, over time, you will be able to anticipate what will happen in your garden. Through your ever-increasing knowledge, you will come to love and understand your little piece of earth all the more.

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