

HMA Victoria Sustainable Timber Policy

March 23, 2012

The Horticultural Media Association Victoria is keen to spread awareness of and inform garden journalists and broadcasters in the origin of timber used in Australian gardens. The choices we make as consumers are powerful. As gardening media and landscape professionals, we have the opportunity to empower gardeners to make ethical choices when it comes to selecting and buying timber for the garden.

1. THE PROBLEM

Illegal logging of rainforests is an issue that we cannot ignore. Sadly, some of the timber currently being imported, sold and used commercially in Australia originates from illegal logging in tropical rainforest areas in Asia. Global deforestation is an environmental problem that results in higher levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere. It is also a significant cause of global biodiversity decline. This can impact not only flora and fauna, but also local communities and villages in remote areas who rely on forests as sources of food, clean water and shelter.

Consumer demand here in Australia, and overseas contributes directly to this problem as rainforests are fast being logged for commercial and domestic use. The sale of illegally logged timbers undermines the economic viability of ethically sourced and managed plantation timbers.

2. THE ISSUES

Rainforest Timbers

There are several species of imported rainforest timber readily available and used in gardens in Australia including Merbau (*Intsia bijuga*), Kempas (*Koompassia* spp.) and Balau (*Shorea* spp.). An emotional international issue linked to our demand for these timbers is the destruction of habitat, threatening the last remaining populations of Orangutans.

Merbau (*Intsia bijuga*) also known as Kwila or Ipil

In Australia, Merbau is commonly used as a durable hardwood for interior finishing, flooring and paneling, while outside it is very popular for decks, screens and outdoor furniture. Merbau is listed as a threatened species in Indonesia, vulnerable in the Philippines and almost extinct in Sabah. It is only in PNG that commercial quantities now exist. Merbau is a lowland rainforest tree that produces one of the most valuable timbers in tropical Asia. Few natural stands remain in Malaysia. Mature trees are so rare that young trees with trunk girths of only 40cm are being logged due to the high prices they command. Although a small number of plantations exist, much of the wood we use comes from unknown sources and this is the concern for Australian consumers.

3. SOLUTIONS

Certification

There are several recognised certification schemes for ethically sourced timber. To ensure you are buying legally sourced timber, confirm it comes from certified sources by asking the supplier for a copy of the certification.

Forest Stewardship Council®

The Forest Stewardship Council® is an internationally recognised not for profit organisation set up to develop standards to promote responsible management of the world's forests. It accredits independent third party organisations which can certify forest managers and forest product producers to FSC® standards. The FSC® trademark provides international recognition to organisations that support the growth of responsible forest management. When you purchase FSC® certified timber, its product label allows consumers to recognise products that support the growth of responsible forest management worldwide. Products that are FSC® Certified will generally have a label that looks something like these:



authorisation code FSC-AUS-0030
The mark of responsible forestry

The Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)

There are several other recognised forms of certification including The Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). This is an international non-profit, non-government organisation dedicated to promoting Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) through independent third-party certification.

Greenpeace Good Wood Guide

Greenpeace Australia Pacific has developed an online wood guide that helps people make informed decisions as to the choices of timber they make. The website is easy to use and is recognised and recommended by the Forest Stewardship Council®. www.goodwoodguide.org.au

4. LOCAL TIMBER SOURCES

When it comes to consuming any resource, there are no perfect answers. There is a myriad of places from which to source timber, each with its benefit and cost. By introducing these issues to your audience and clients for discussion, they will be better able to make the right choices.

Plantation Timber

For: Plantations in Australia are well managed and policed. The introduction of multi-species plantations is something that seems to be the ideal future for tree plantations in Australia. The Australian timber industry is active in researching best practices for long-term sustainable timber plantations.

Against: Some groups will argue that timber plantations create monocultures, and lack the biodiversity of a natural forest that contains multiple tree species. Some plantations also use weed killers and fertilisers.

Examples: For plantation-sourced timber, supply options include treated Radiata Pine (*Pinus radiata*) and Cypress Pine (*Callitris* sp)

Regrowth Forests in Australia

A regrowth forest is one that has had either all or most of its mature trees cleared or cut and felled for timber or woodchips. In many cases the area will be burnt after logging, before regrowth can take place.

For: Regrowth forests provide employment to many small communities in Australia, as well as supplying a well-managed and legal source of timber to Australian consumers. Some would say selective harvesting of native hardwoods actually helps to increase light in forests, thus producing larger diameter trees more suitable for native animal habitat.

Against: Detractors will argue that flora and fauna and our native forests suffer as a result of logging.

Examples: Australian hardwood timbers from regrowth forests include Spotted Gum (*Corymbia maculata*), Red Ironbark (*Eucalyptus sideroxylon*), Blackbutt (*E pilularis* & *E patens*) and Grey Ironbark (*E paniculata*).

Reclaimed Farm Timber

In parts of Australia, small timber mills exist that utilise wood from old farm trees. For instance, reclaimed timber from Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) trees that were planted by farmers as windbreaks at the turn of the last century can be utilised for exterior use.

Recycled or Reused Timbers

There is no shortage of recycled timber merchants in every state of Australia. Recycled timber will come from building sites earmarked for demolition such as old warehouses, homes, piers and large rural sheds. Make sure you ask for a suitable timber for outside and/or in-ground use. Recycling timber is a great way to utilise timber without adding pressure to already depleted rainforests, and it also supports Australian business.

FSC® Certified Australian Timbers

To ensure you are recommending or using Australian certified timbers, FSC® certificates issued to Australian forest managers currently cover the following species:

Acacia mangium (Black Wattle)
Corymbia maculata (Spotted Gum)
Eucalyptus dalrympleana (White Mountain Gum)
Eucalyptus fastigata (Brown Barrel, Cut-Tail)
Eucalyptus globulus (Blue Gum)
Eucalyptus spp
Eucalyptus grandis (Flooded Gum, Rose Gum)
Eucalyptus paniculata (Grey Ironbark)
Eucalyptus saligna (Sydney Blue Gum)
Eucalyptus tereticornis (Forest Red Gum and others)
Eucalyptus viminalis (White Gum, Ribbon Gum)
Pinus radiata (Radiata Pine)

(check www.fscaustralia.org for updates)

When Selecting Timber for Your Garden Project:

1. Identify the source of your timber. If it is a rainforest timber, ask your supplier for a copy of the approved certification (FSC®) to ensure it is from a certified source. Imported timber species are of greatest concern.
2. Consider using recycled/ reclaimed/ reused timber
3. Consider a FSC® certified plantation timber or regrowth forest timber
4. Check www.goodwoodguide.org.au to research your timber choice is ethical and from sustainable sources
5. Check the FSC® certification on the product and make sure it has a code underneath it. The code then can be entered into the FSC® international database <http://info.fsc.org> and the origin of the product verified.

Sources & References

1. Forest Stewardship Council®
www.fscaustralia.org
2. If you would like to become a member of the FSC® visit
www.fscaustralia.org/get-involved/become-a-member
3. Greenpeace Good Wood Guide
www.goodwoodguide.org.au
4. The Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)
www.pefc.org
5. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)
www.cites.org
6. Save the Orangutans, visit:
www.orangutan.org.au
www.savetheorangutan.co.uk
http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/09/0930_030930_orangutanthreat.html

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