

Descriptions of major dune plants

Ball nut (*Calophyllum inophyllum*)

Description

Ball nut is a large, spreading, evergreen tree that can grow to a height of 15 metres. It has a multi-branched crooked trunk and pale grey bark with shallow longitudinal grooves. The branches or stems are long and smooth and are square in cross-section when young. The stems exude a sticky yellow sap when cut. The simple stiff leaves are arranged opposite each other and are made conspicuous by the densely packed parallel veins extending from the midrib to the leaf margin. These glossy leaves are 10-20cm long, dark green, smooth and leathery.

The showy, white, fragrant flowers with numerous yellow stamens are borne in clusters on short stalks in the axils of the upper leaves. The green, globe-shaped fruit are succulent and have smooth, thick skin. They are up to 5cm in diameter, contain only one seed, and hang from a long stalk. The round seed is about the size of a walnut.

Distribution

The ball nut is a native tree of coastal areas of northern Australia. It prefers the relatively sheltered, well-drained sites on sandy beaches and dune systems along the coastline of central and northern



Queensland. Although it will persist on the drier parts of the coastline, it grows more vigorously and exhibits greater tolerance to exposure on the higher rainfall areas of the tropical coast.

Function

Ball nut is a useful tree for coastal and esplanade plantings on sandy, well-drained sites. It is a hardy tree and resistant to salt spray. This species is useful for shade, shelter and windbreaks and can be included in tree-planting programs for hind-dune areas set aside for passive recreation and parkland. It is quick to establish and is effective in stabilising coastal sand dunes.

Propagation

Ball nut is usually propagated from seed. Flowering occurs throughout the year but the main flowering periods are in January and July. Seeds germinate easily and seedling growth may be rapid for several years. After this, growth often slows down and subsequent annual increments become smaller.

Nursery-raised seedlings in 150mm pots are transplanted into protected dunal areas when about 45cm tall. Some seedling losses can be expected following transplantation, particularly if the nursery-raised seedlings have not been well hardened for growth on the dunes.



Ball nut used as a shade tree in a foreshore parkland situation.