Wild Western Australian sandalwood

Western Australian sandalwood (Santalum spicatum) occurs naturally in the southern semi-arid and arid regions of Western Australia. Its story is one of our oldest, the Aboriginal people have used this resource for thousands of years, understanding both the healing properties and its use as a food source.

Sandalwood is a slow-growing, hemi-parasitic small tree, requiring suitable host plants such as acacias from the seedling stage through to maturity. It is long-lived and typically grows to about four metres in height with a stem diameter of 200 millimetres.

Wild sandalwood harvesting and silviculture

The FPC is responsible for the commercial harvesting, regeneration, marketing, and sale of wild sandalwood from Crown lands, including land subject to pastoral leases as prescribed by the Forest Products Act 2000 and the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016.

The FPC also complies with the Native Title Act 1993 and Aboriginal Heritage Act 1974.

Up to 2,250 tonnes of wild sandalwood is permitted to be harvested by the FPC each year. This consists of approximately 50 per cent green sandalwood (or live trees) and 50 per cent dead sandalwood.

Approximately 21 million hectares of conservation areas managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) contain wild sandalwood that is not available for harvest.

In sandalwood harvesting locations, an operational camp is normally established to accommodate contractors and their employees and prepare harvested sandalwood for transport.

The entire sandalwood tree is utilised, including the roots which are valuable due to their high oil content. Using all of the tree decreases the number of trees harvested and in turn lengthens the harvest rotation.
Western Australian sandalwood

Plantation sandalwood
The FPC manages about 6,000 hectares of sandalwood plantations across the Mid-West, Wheatbelt and South-West regions on 153 properties.

In collaboration with the Australian Sandalwood Network, the FPC has developed the Sandalwood Establishment Guide. This guide is based on 30 years of plantation research and experience and provides advice to landowners on how to grow plantation sandalwood in Western Australia.

Establishing sandalwood in plantations is more complex than most tree species, due to sandalwood being a root hemi-parasite. The best host trees are typically nitrogen-fixing species including many acacia species, especially *Acacia acuminata*. To successfully grow sandalwood in plantations, they normally require 2-3 long-lived hosts to support them through to a commercial age of approximately 25 years.

The FPC’s first sandalwood plantations will mature for harvest in 2026.

Sandalwood Dreaming
Aboriginal Peoples from the Western deserts to the coast have a holistic connection to sandalwood in culture, healing, and sustenance.

Sandalwood Dreaming is an initiative of the FPC’s *Reconciliation Action Plan* to engage Aboriginal businesses and traditional owners to harvest and regenerate sandalwood to provide economic opportunities today and a sandalwood resource for generations of traditional owners to come. Sandalwood Dreaming is aligned with the Western Australian Government’s Aboriginal Engagement Policy.

The FPC continues its contracted supply of high-grade sandalwood to a registered aboriginal Kalgoorlie-based business: Dutjahn Sandalwood Oils, and is currently investigating further value-adding opportunities for Aboriginal People to use sandalwood as a raw material in value-added products.

Wild sandalwood regeneration
The FPC’s objective for wild sandalwood regeneration is to establish a cohort of young trees in natural vegetation, including current harvest operational areas, previously harvested areas, and regions where sandalwood is in decline.

Sandalwood is mainly established by direct seeding to a depth of approximately 2-5 cm in rip-lines done by a mechanical ripper.

The seeder’s design mimics the actions of woylies and boodies, which are small native marsupials. Woylies and boodies used to be present in central Western Australia and have been shown to cache sandalwood seeds and promote seed dispersal and germination.

With the introduction of feral cats and foxes, these small marsupials disappeared. The mechanical sandalwood seeder is helping to improve sandalwood regeneration again. In areas less accessible to the mechanical seeder, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander planters are engaged through the FPC’s Sandalwood Dreaming contracts to hand-seed sandalwood back into the Rangelands.

More information
For more information, please visit www.fpc.wa.gov.au, email info@fpc.wa.gov.au or call (08) 9363 4600.