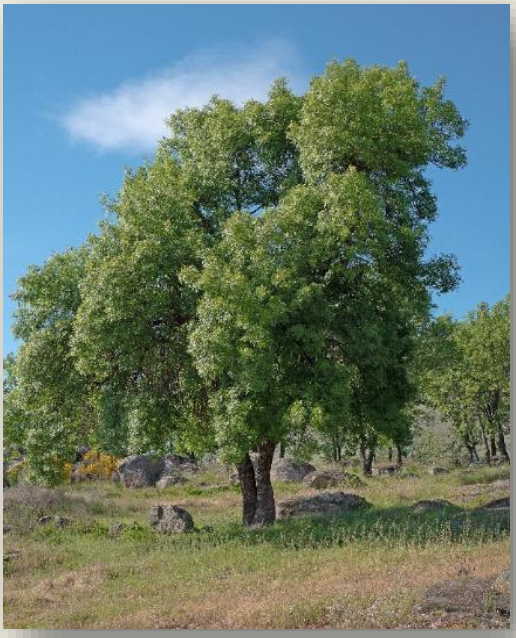
Desert Ash
Fraxinus angustifolia

A tree of significance on Anzac Day



Desert Ash, *Fraxinus angustifolia*, Photograph: Luis Fernández Garcia Losar de la Vera (Cáceres, España).

There are two trees and a shrub that are of particular significance on Anzac Day. Sprigs of Rosemary, *Salvia rosmarinus*, are worn on the lapel in remembrance of soldiers of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) who served valiantly at Gallipoli on the Turkish coast in 1915, an apt tribute because Rosemary is a native of much of the Mediterranean coast and common along the Gallipoli Peninsula.

On the Gallipoli Peninsula, a single pine, *Pinus brutia*, marked the site of the 1915 Battle of Lone Pine, and seeds of that species, and another pine, *Pinus halepensis*, the Aleppo Pine, were brought back to Australia after the war. Trees of both species are now grown in Australian and New Zealand parks and gardens as memorials to the Australian and New Zealand soldiers who were at Gallipoli.



Rosemary: Photograph: I, KENPEI, CC BY-SA 3.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>, via Wikimedia Commons



'Lone Pine', *Pinus brutia* in Türkiye. Photograph: Zeynel Cebeci, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

But there is another tree, not nearly as well known, that also has links to battlefields of WWI. *Fraxinus angustifolia,* the Desert Ash, or Narrow-leaved Ash, occurs naturally in many Mediterranean countries of southern Europe, north-west Africa and western Asia, including Türkiye, of course. Seeds of Desert Ash too were brought back from the various theatres of war and were planted in parks, gardens and along memorial driveways in many regions of Australia.



Memorial Avenue of Desert Ash, *Fraxinus angustifolia*, O'Connell, Central Western NSW. Photograph: Kathy Manton 2023.



Fraxinus angustifolia – Natural distribution, Map by Giovanni Caudullo CC BY 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

One memorial driveway planted with Desert Ash can be found in O'Connell, a village 20 kilometres south of Bathurst in Central Western New South Wales. O'Connell has a memorial avenue flanked by 123 Desert Ash Trees planted in 1926 to remember more than 60 local people who served in WWI. The trees were raised by the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney from seed brought back from the Middle East. Desert Ash trees were selected ~~for the memorial avenue~~ partly because of their toughness and resilience, but principally because of their ties to battle fields of the Sinai-Palestine campaign of WWI. The Memorial Avenue was officially opened in 1926, one hundred years ago, by Field Marshall Viscount Allenby who commanded Australian troops in that campaign





Originally Desert Ash was widely planted in Australian parks and gardens and as a street tree, but unfortunately, it eventually became naturalised in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. To counter the invasive properties, a breeding and selection program was instigated in the 1930s to produce a *sterile* form. A seedling, *Fraxinus angustifolia* subsp. *oxycarpa* 'Raywood', later known as **Claret Ash,** had been discovered in the Adelaide Hills in 1910 and propagated for its deep purple Autumn foliage. As it was sterile, it became the preferred alternative to the more promiscuous Desert Ash. In Adelaide, Claret Ash trees planted in 1937 line most of the memorial Anzac Highway from the City to Glenelg, forming an avenue almost 10 km long.



Claret Ash – *Fraxinus angustifolia* subsp. *oxycarpa* 'Raywood' – growing on Macquarie University campus

National Advocate, Bathurst, Thursday 21 January 1926 Page 2: Lord Allenby: https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/161494286
National Trust: https://trusttrees.org.au/tree/SA/Keswick/4_Anzac_Highway
National Weeds Strategy: http://www.weeds.org.au/cgi-bin/weedident.cgi?tpl=plant.tpl&ibra=all&card=E15O'Connell Valley Community Group, press release March 3, 2026:
O'Connell's ANZAC Memorial Avenue Celebrates Its Centennial Anniversary.
Wikipedia: Rosemary - Wikipedia
Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claret_ash
Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fraxinus_angustifolia
Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lone_Pine_(tree)

Alison Downing, Brian Atwell, Karen Marais and Kevin Downing

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School of Natural Sciences