

Plant of the Week  
*Castanospermum*  
*australe*  
**Queensland**  
**Black Bean**



The **Queensland Black Bean**, or **Moreton Bay Chestnut**, can be found in rainforests from north-eastern New South Wales to Iron Range in Queensland's Cape York Peninsula. Surprisingly, it also grows on the Pacific islands of Vanuatu and New Caledonia and is widely cultivated in India, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and North America. In an optimum environment, trees can reach 40 metres but in Sydney specimens are usually 5 to 10 metres high. The dark brown timber has been highly prized for cabinet making.

This spectacular tree is famous for its colourful flowers and massive fruits, and yes, it is a legume, related to peas, beans, soy beans and peanuts. However, in spite of being related to these edible plants, Black Bean seeds are toxic and should not be eaten.

The flowers are unusual in that they grow directly out of the trunk, or out of thick branches. This characteristic is known as "cauliflory" – from "caulis" – "stem" and "flos" – "flower". Flowers of trees which exhibit cauliflory are often pollinated and seeds dispersed by animals, for example small possums. Black Beans are pollinated by parrots and bats.



Map: <http://anbg.gov.au>

Images: A. Downing

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