



Covering The Landscape

Under The Rainbow

Although not widely used, rainbow eucalyptus can make a strong statement in moist, tropical landscapes.

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While eucalyptus trees may inspire thoughts of the land “Down Under” and koala bears, the rainbow eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus deglupta*) is unique among eucalypts. Unlike other members of the genus, rainbow eucalyptus hails from the Philippine Islands; specifically, the island of Mindanao, which is why the tree is also referred to as a Mindanao gum. *E. deglupta* was introduced to the Hawaiian Islands in 1929. In fact, many people

have their first experience with these trees while visiting Hawaii.

Rainbows are tropical trees accustomed to a rainforest type of environment. While they grow more slowly in the cooler winter weather of South Florida, the trees retain their leaves year-round. Rainbows should be protected from freezes, but they can withstand light frost conditions for short periods. Summertime is when these trees can really show their vigor and growth speed. They may grow 8 to 10 feet in a growing season, and even more with extremely good care.

Rainbow eucalyptus is a fast-growing tree that retains its leaves year-round.



Beautiful Bark

The tree gets its common name from the striking stripes of color on its trunks and limbs. While they look as though they were painted on, these ever-changing colors are an entirely natural feature. Unlike trees such as oaks, rainbow eucalyptus does not have a thick, corky layer of bark on the trunk. Instead, the bark is smooth and vibrantly alive, and as it grows, it exfoliates thin layers of spent tissue. This process occurs in irregular zones at different times. Once the layers come off, they reveal new and fresh green bark.

As the newly exposed bark slowly ages, it changes from bright green to a darker green, then bluish to purplish, and then pink-orange. Finally, the color becomes a brownish maroon right before exfoliation occurs. Since this process is happening in different zones of the trunk and in different stages, simultaneously, the colors are varied and almost constantly changing. As a result, the tree will never have the same color pattern twice, making it like a work of living art.



Eucalyptus deglupta features striking, multicolored bark.

Water Liberally

Water is very important to rainbow eucalyptus, especially when it is young. If this tree is grown under condi-

tions where water is not abundant, the growth rate will be much slower, and the exfoliation will occur in small flecks rather than long strips. When growing in containers, never allow *E. deglupta* to dry out, as this can prove fatal to the tree very quickly.

For landscape use, the ideal location for rainbow eucalyptus is near freshwater ponds, lakes, or canals. Mature trees can survive and grow in drier areas, but they become their most luxuriant when they have access to abundant moisture.

Other Advantages

E. deglupta is largely pest-free. Occasionally a few mealybugs or aphids may appear, and the odd caterpillar or leafcutting bee may disfigure some leaves, but the tree can be grown without excessive concern about pest damage.

Growers should consider an application of mycorrhizal inoculum to their plantings, especially when planting in developed areas where the soil has been severely disturbed.

Although rainbow eucalyptus is a wonder to behold and can add a magical dimension to the landscape, it produces none of the familiar aromatic oils that other eucalypts do — making it ideal for those who desire a quieter olfactory environment.

This tree deserves to be more widely planted in the warmer climate areas of the mainland United States. For more information on rainbow eucalyptus, see <http://eucalyptusdeglupta.com>. ■

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