

Griffith's Ash (*Fraxinus griffithii*)
Olive family (*Oleaceae*)



Griffith's ash (*Fraxinus griffithii*) is a small slender tree native to southeast Asia (the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia, Taiwan, China, southern Japan, Bangladesh and India). It is one of the few tropical trees in its genus. Usually it is evergreen, but in cooler climates it will be deciduous.

Its leaves are smaller than typical ash leaves, glabrous and shiny green. They are pinnately compound, mostly 5 to 11 leaflets per leaf, while its trunk is smooth and light gray. It grows to 15 m/45 ft in height with an 8 m/25 ft spread. Its slightly fragrant panicles of small white flowers come in spring.

The tree is harvested from the wild for local use as a medicine and source of wood. Trees in the *Fraxinus* genus contain compounds known to exhibit pharmacological properties including anticancer, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antimicrobial, and neuroprotective properties. At one time it was believed to be an opium substitute. But although the smell is similar, it doesn't contain opiates.

Griffith's ash is a natural pioneer species and used in reforestation projects as well as shade trees in coffee plantations. It grows in any kind of soil and flourishes in sun or shade. It is found on old lava flows or open rain forest from sea level to 2,000 m/6,000 ft. This quick-growing drought tolerant tree has been planted as a street tree in Australia. But it started to naturalize in

2007 and is on the 'Save Our Waterways Now - Weeds to Whack' site. A perfect small street tree - attractive leaves and flowers too - but primed by its pioneer genes for the jump to take over.

But Griffith's ash is resistant to the emerald ash borer. Our native ash trees in North America are critically endangered because of the emerald ash borer, a native of China. No North American ash species is resistant to this pest. In China the native ash population has gradually evolved a resistance to this insect. And that's why the collecting of *Fraxinus* seeds in China has become key - looking for suitable substitutes for our dying native ashes or the possibility of a hybrid of the North American/Chinese ash with resistance to the emerald ash borer.

The genus name '*Fraxinus*' is derived from Latin 'frango' to break, referring to the ease with which its wood can be split. The specific epithet '*griffithii*' is named for Dr. William Griffith (1810-1845), a British doctor and botanist. He was a civil surgeon in Myanmar (Burma), where he studied local plants and made a number of collecting trips.

Not many botanical gardens or arboreta have Griffith's ash in their collection. Our one and only Griffith's ash came from Hillier Nurseries in the UK in 1981. According to our curator, Roy Forster was importing a lot of trees from Hillier at that time. Hillier Nurseries is the largest grower of trees (both field and container grown) in the UK. It specializes in semi-mature trees.



The summer and winter Fraxinus griffithii tree pictures were taken at VanDusen in bed 123. The flowering tree and leaf pictures are from Diaco's Garden Nursery (diacos.com.au)

<https://diacos.com.au/product/fraxinus-griffithii-evergreen-flowering-ash/>

https://keyserver.lucidcentral.org/weeds/data/media/Html/fraxinus_griffithii.htm

<https://www.public.asu.edu/~camartin/plants/Plant%20html%20files/fraxinusgriffithii.html>

<https://www.invasivespeciescentre.ca/invasive-species/meet-the-species/invasive-insects/emerald-ash-borer/>

<https://plants.jstor.org/stable/10.5555/al.ap.person.bm000151563>

<https://members.royalwarrant.org/company/hillier-nurseries-ltd>