



Trees of Williamstown Botanic Gardens

Botanical Name: *Ulmus procera*

Common Name: English Elm

Origin: Western and Southern Europe



Elms (*Ulmus*) are usually large deciduous but occasionally evergreen trees growing to a height of 25m. Elms are grown for their yellow autumn foliage and tolerance to a wide range of growing conditions. Many elms sucker and suffer from a wide range of diseases and insects. Internationally, Dutch Elm Disease has wiped out most of the elm trees in the northern hemisphere and New Zealand. Fortunately this devastating fungal disease has not been recorded in Australia but since 1989 Elm Leaf Beetle, which skeletonises the leaves, has spread throughout most of Victoria. It has been estimated that there are about 70,000 elms in Victoria, half of which are managed by local government. Melbourne City Council is responsible for about 6,000 elm trees. City of Hobsons Bay is responsible for about 650 elm trees.

Elms were amongst a group of plants despatched by Governor King from England on 23 May 1803. The earliest known nursery catalogue of James Dickson of Hobart in 1845 lists two elms, *Ulmus campestris* (which now includes *Ulmus procera*) and *Ulmus suberosa*. The oldest English Elms in Victoria are in the Royal Botanic Gardens, they were planted in about 1845 by the first superintendent John Arthur, and are known as "Arthur's Elms". Elms were planted in the Fitzroy Gardens from 1859, Victoria Parade in 1878-90, Royal Parade 1897 and the central rows in 1910-15.

Elms, either English Elm or Dutch Elm (*Ulmus x hollandica*) were often the preferred tree for World War I, Avenue of Honour plantings including Eurack (1915), Ballarat (1917-19) and Bacchus Marsh (1918). Other elm avenues occur at Kingston, Wallan, Digby, and Traralgon.

The bark is grey and fissured, except for Chinese Elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*) which is scaly and orange-brown, but occasionally grey and finely fissured, and is evergreen or semi-evergreen. The leaves are simple, toothed, alternate and generally unequal at the base. Unlike most other plants which uses flowers to separate species the variations of the elm leaf is used, which can explain why there is often difficulty with elm identification.

English Elm can be distinguished from the widely planted Dutch Elm, by its smaller almost round leaves that vary considerably in size on the same branchlet. The leaves are rough on the upper surface and dense soft hair on the lower surface of young leaves, leaf stalk and branchlets. The leaves are abruptly pointed. **Dutch Elm** leaves have a tapering point, are long and glossy and smooth on the upper surface.