

## Urban Koala Tree Project



*Eight year old Mt Beerwah Mallee planted at University of the Sunshine Coast (left); Mt Beerwah Mallee buds and leaves (middle); Mt Beerwah Mallee seedlings planted at James Cash Park, Eatons Hill (right).*

The Urban Koala Tree Project commenced in 2006 as a collaborative research project between council and the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) to deliver small growing gum trees suitable for use in urban areas. The Mt Beerwah Mallee (*Eucalyptus kabiana*) was selected as a candidate for the program. For the last nine years researchers from USC have been trialling the gum tree, with several specimens planted at the university campus.

Researchers initially tested 20 different trees from around South East Queensland for their suitability as urban gum trees. The tests included grafting tall growing koala food trees onto short growing trees, selecting for shorter populations of usually tall gum trees and selecting shorter growing gum trees. All of the trees were tested in garden situations and the only tree that stayed short and survived was the Mt Beerwah Mallee.

Leading the USC research project, Associate Professor of Plant Science, Dr Stephen Trueman, said the Mt Beerwah Mallee grows to approximately 6m in seven years. It is a sister species to the koala's favourite food tree, the blue gum, which reaches 20m.

The Mt Beerwah Mallee trees will provide food for koalas, counter lost habitat and help provide corridors between existing koala habitats.

### In brief - Mt Beerwah Mallee

- It is a local gum tree, closely related to blue gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*).
- As young trees, they are difficult to distinguish from the blue gum, but as mature trees they exhibit much lower growth, with attractive red colouring to young stem growth and white flowers.
- It is listed as Vulnerable under both the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Commonwealth) and the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Queensland) and is only found growing naturally on rocky slopes of the Glasshouse Mountains.
- In order to collect seeds from the trees in the wild and propagate seedlings for use in the trial, USC obtained a permit from the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.
- The tree is now propagated by USC as a 'captive population' under permit. It is not yet available commercially and limited propagation material exists.