

Canarium/Gali



What is it?

Canarium indicum, also called ngali, is a tall, rainforest tree that grows naturally in tropical areas of southeast Asia and Melanesia.

It is a fast-growing, wind-tolerant tree that prefers well-drained soil but can also grow in wetter soils. Branches removed by high winds are usually replaced, and a long taproot helps keep the tree in place. Typical heights are 20m-30m.

Canarium can grow in semi-shaded or shaded positions, and usually makes up part of the natural forest canopy. It grows in lower elevations, in coastal areas and up to 600m in elevation. Although it likes tropical conditions, it can tolerate periods of dry. It is not suited for sandy or salty coastal soils with few nutrients.

It produces nuts that are edible, and can also be used for oil or flour. (The shell coating should not be used, as it can cause stomach illness.) Nuts are typically collected from forest trees or from trees planted in gardens and villages for cash crops.

There is often good local knowledge about which Canarium varieties or individual trees have the best nuts or the highest yield.

How Can I Use it?

Canarium nuts have multiple uses:

- Shelled Canarium/ngali nuts can be eaten raw, cooked or smoked.
- Nuts can be coarsely ground for flour or pressed for oil. This oil can be substituted for coconut oil and is used in cooking and also for skin care.
- Coarsely ground nuts can be roasted and used as an ingredient in a pudding or other foods. Nuts can also be roasted and eaten on their own.
- Nuts can be kept in shells long-term, and are generally resistant to pests (rats, mice, etc.).

Canarium trees have traditional uses beyond eating of nuts:

- The timber is light and can be used for construction or for firewood.
- Canarium wood has traditionally been used for woodcraft such as making bowls.
- Trees can be planted for windbreaks as they are wind-tolerant.
- Trees can provide shade for other crops.
- Resin is used for incense.
- The bark has been used in traditional medicine.
- Trees provide shade in village areas, stabilize soil and help keep local knowledge and culture alive.



Photo credit: ACIR, 2008

How Can I Grow it?

You can grow Canarium trees from the ngali nut/seed. If not planting immediately, remove outer layer of seed and store in a dry place away from vermin for a few weeks.

Seedlings grow best soon after collecting the seeds.

- Soak nuts/seeds for 24 hours before planting.
- Discard nuts that float.
- Sow seeds on their sides, 1cm deep in soil.
- Seeds can be planted in pots or in bags with soil.
- Seedlings can be planted out when they are 30cm tall or 3 months old.
- Plant seedlings in a semi-shaded or shaded area.

Canarium nuts can be dried and processed for the export market. This can often bring more income to communities but does need specialist equipment.

To find out more about processing Canarium nuts, please talk to your MAL extension officer.

