5. Seedlings: Buying balsa seedlings could cost 30 toea each: at least K18 required.

Inputs: Plant quality seedlings (left) - don’t use wild seed or wildlings and control weeds (right).

6. Planting: Site preparation and planting 60 balsa trees takes one farmer a full day.

7. Weeds and protection: Weeding 60 balsa trees takes one half day for a farmer every 6 weeks for the first 6 months. You must kill pests such as African giant snails which eat balsa and prevent fires from entering your balsa trees.

Protection: Kill African giant snails (left) and slash weeds to help protect balsa from fire (right).

8. Pruning: To maximise logs sold and therefore returns, balsa must be pruned — you need time (about 2 hours for a farmer to prune 60 trees), a pruning saw and ladder.

For more information: See: www.pip.com.pg for copies of the fact sheets.

Contact The ACIAR Project Officer, Mr Jaupo Minimulu on 7251 2787 or the Integrated Agriculture Training Program, The Papua New Guinea University of Natural Resources and Environment on 675 983 9736.

ACIAR Balsa Project Fact Sheet #1:
How does balsa fit with my family & my land?

Introduction
Balsa trees grow well in ENBP, and provide income to farmers after 5 - 6 years. The only markets for balsa are for export; it has no on-farm or local uses. Balsa may not suit all farmers; so if you are interested to grow balsa, you need first to decide whether balsa suits your available land, your time and your family’s needs. This Fact Sheet is #1 of 6 about growing, managing and selling balsa. It will help you decide whether balsa is for you and your family. A first step is to draw a map of your land, and use the checklist below to find where balsa best fits.

Balsa site checklist

1. Safety: Plant balsa at least 50 m away from buildings in the village.

Balsa trees too close to a house: A mature balsa tree can be over 35 m tall and the wind may blow them over or at harvest they may fall on close by buildings.

2. Power-lines: Plant balsa 50 m away from power-lines.

3. Slope: Plant balsa on gentle slopes which are easy to walk up and down to make harvesting safe and environmentally friendly.
Right site: Balsa trees too close a power line at Kerevat prevented their harvest (left). Balsa logs are carried to the truck for loading so the site should be easy to walk across (right).

4. **Site conditions:** Good balsa growth occurs on sites with uniform rainfall and deep fertile and well drained soils.

5. **Minimum number of trees:** Plant at least 60 balsa trees at 4 X 4 m spacing to have enough logs to make the trees worth harvesting by a sawmill (log buyer).

**Access to and within your land**

1. **Distances to a sawmill:** The cost of log transport is significant. If you are more than 20 km by road from the closest sawmill, you may not be able to sell your balsa logs as it is too far to transport the logs.

2. **Access to and within your land:** Access roads must be drivable all-year-round by a log truck. Trucks will need to travel to your balsa trees past other crops (e.g. cocoa) and need much space to avoid damage to the other crops.

Local access roads: A balsa log truck hauling balsa logs to a sawmill (left) must have good access to allow a farmer to sell balsa logs. Roads must be well surfaced in wet and/or steep sections to allow the truck access (right).

Fit of balsa with cash crops

1. **Shading:** Balsa trees grow fast and shade out the area underneath.

Shade: Balsa trees grow fast and by 12 months old shade-out below (left). Before shaded out, short-term crops can be grown under balsa (e.g. peanuts), with soil cultivation only in the first two months to protect balsa trees roots. A 5 year old balsa stand crop shades out below (right).

2. **Set back:** Plant balsa at least 50 m (60 to 65 paces) away from cocoa to prevent shade and damage if the trees fall over, and from damage during harvest of the balsa.

3. **Protection:** Tall balsa trees can provide shelter from wind damage to cocoa.

**Balsa fit with family livelihood: a checklist**

1. **Time:** A balsa tree takes 5 years to be ready for harvest: can you wait that long?

2. **Your uses:** Balsa is not suitable for local use by farmers – it must be sold.

3. **Your land:** Have you got enough land for 60 balsa trees?

4. **Cash crops:** After 12 months, few plants will grow under balsa due to shade.