**Introduction**

Balsa is a good tree for planting by ENBP farmers, providing future income by selling the trees to processors. Balsa has no on-farm uses, only export markets. A farmer considering balsa should understand the stages of growth for balsa. Balsa is a very fast growing tree harvested at 5 to 6 years for processing into a range of wood products. This Fact Sheet (#2 of 6) helps you understand the different stages of growth of balsa trees.

**Balsa - stages of growth**

Balsa is a flowering plant which sets seed in unusual seed pods after pollination by bats. Balsa plants are grown in the nursery in poly bags and it is best to buy good quality seed rather than collect wild seed or wildlings. After planting, with good weed control, balsa tree height growth is rapid to reach around 35 m in height after 5 to 6 years. With large leaves, a stand of balsa trees will shade out the ground below from around 6 to 12 months of age.

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**For more information:**

See: [www.pip.com.pg](http://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.
Balsa seedlings: Seedlings must be well watered (left) and they are ready to plant at 20 - 30 cm tall, and with at least 3 to 4 leaves.

Rapid growth: A ring weeded balsa seedling within weeks of planting (left). Balsa trees age 10 months (right) with rapid height growth - balsa trees can be 6 - 12 metres high after 12 months.

Shade: A balsa site at age 18 months with some weeds growing in the limited light (left). 6 year old balsa trees ready to harvest at 30 - 35 m tall (right).

**Balsa branching**

Farmer returns from growing balsa are driven by the volume of logs recovered from balsa tree stems. Stem defects and therefore loss of log volume (reducing returns) can result from branches growing from the stem. A farmer can carefully prune the branches, in particular tip pruning jorquette. Select the jorquette branch most likely to become the stem and remove the branch tips of the other two to slow there growth. Later prune these branches.

Branching: Balsa trees develops large leaves attached to the tree stem and in some cases water branches may develop (left). A high-angle permanent balsa branch: this should be pruned (right).

Pruning: A pruned permanent branch on a young tree with bark growing over the branch stub (left). A permanent branch results in an undesirable solid knot imbedded in an end-product board (right).

**Jorquettes**

A balsa tree jorquette at 18 months (left) will require tip and final pruning to promote a single strong stem. A major stem defect and loss of log volume due to an unmanaged jorquette (right).

**After harvesting**

Harvest residues should be kept onsite to help keep the site fertile to grow more balsa or another crop. Larger residues could be piled in rows for ease of access.