

Plant Profile – Native Limes - Graeme White (Witjuti Grub Bushfood Nursery)



Exotic citrus species were first introduced into Australia in 1788 by members of the First Fleet. But it wasn't for another 100 years that colonial botanists had 'discovered' that there were several species of citrus endemic to Australia. Aborigines have traditionally included native citrus fruit as part of their diet for thousands of years, the European settlers, however, only started to recognize their potential during the mid 19th century and began using the strange fruit to make jams, cordials and desserts.

There are in fact, 6 endemic citrus species, 4 of which occur in the rainforests of the east coast from Cape York to northern NSW. The other two are unique members of the citrus family in that they are the only ones that naturally occur in a semi-arid environment. The native limes were, until recently, classified under the genus *Microcitrus* due to the relatively small size of their flowers and fruit but now have been re-classified as true *Citrus*.

Of the four rainforest species, two occur in southeast Queensland. These are the Finger Lime, *Citrus australasica* and the Round Lime, *Citrus australis* also known as the Gympie lime or by its Aboriginal name, Dooja.

The Finger Lime is found in the wild from the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales to Mt Tamborine and is probably the best known of the native limes. The fruit is unusual in a number of respects, it is finger shaped, or 'Cylindric-fusiform' to be more precise and the pulp of the fruit can vary in colour from yellow to green to pale pink through to crimson and has the unique characteristic of having separate juice vesicles which have the appearance of caviar. When eaten these vesicles burst pleasantly at slight pressure from the teeth to provide a welcome refreshing sensation on the tongue. With a little initial pruning, the Finger Lime forms a compact shrub in the garden but being quite prickly it is a bit of a challenge harvesting. This is where a pair of long handled BBQ tongs comes in handy.

The Round Lime, occurring on the drier margins of the Araucarian vine forests from Brisbane north to Gympie, is the most vigorous of the native citrus, growing to a small, bushy but thorny tree, to about 5 metres in cultivation. This species flowers in spring, then between March and April bears golf ball sized fruit with rough thick skin. The fruit contains a pleasantly acid juice, dryer than the Tahitian lime but the zest is full of flavour due to the presence of abundant aromatic oils, making it the most adaptable of the native limes in the kitchen.

Both species will adapt to a wide range of soil types and will fruit well in semi-shade, but in general they will produce a more prolific crop in full sun. Growth should be encouraged in spring, not autumn, by applications of an organic fertiliser in late winter or spring which will also minimise insect pest predation. For optimum fruit set water regularly from late winter through summer. Their growth habits make them a sanctuary for small birds and being of the Rutaceae family, they attract several species of the magnificent swallowtail butterfly.

The other two northern rainforest limes are the Mount White Lime, *Citrus garawayi* from Cape York Peninsula and the Russel River Lime or *Citrus inodora*, which grows in lowland rainforest at the foot of the Bellenden Ker range, not far from Cairns. Both species are rare in their native habitats and specimens can be difficult to obtain.

The native citrus that occur in the semi-arid regions are the Desert Lime, *Citrus glauca* and the recently described, *Citrus gracilis*, from near Humpty Doo, the Northern Territory. The Desert Lime is an extremely popular and versatile bushfood with its refreshing tangy taste. Plants are available and are an ideal choice for the drier areas but it is doubtful that they would do well in a humid coastal environment.

The native limes are all slow to establish from seedlings but there are grafted selections of the more popular species available. While they are more expensive, they will bear fruit in 1 or 2 years as opposed to 5 or 6 with seedling stock. Be aware that there are a number of native lime hybrids on the market. While they may be interesting specimens in themselves, we don't consider them to be true Bushfoods.



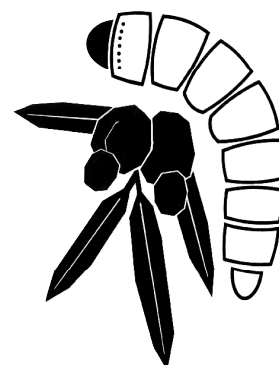
Our indigenous foods, while sometimes reminiscent of 'traditional' foods, have their own unique characteristics and flavours that we need to learn to accept and appreciate, only then can we develop a truly Australian cuisine.

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**Phone : 07 5446 0264
witjutigrub@activ8.net.au
www.witjutigrub.com.au**



Recipe: Dooja - Gympie or Round Lime

Wild Dooja Lime Cream Rice with Wild Dooja Lime Jelly

by John King (Rainforest Liqueurs)

Cream Rice

1 ½ cups boiling water
1 cup Jasmine Rice
3 Tasmanian Pepper Leaves or 1 teasp ground leaf
1 cup milk
1 can condensed sweetened skim milk
½ cup Dooja Lime pulp
100 grams candied ginger pieces thinly sliced
Add rice to boiling water, turn heat to low and simmer 10 min.
Add other ingredients, bring back to boil and turn off. Put lid on saucepan and leave for 20 min.
Remove whole pepper leaves, spoon rice into glasses and set aside.

Dooja Jelly

Zest and juice of two Dooja Limes
¾ cup water
½ cup sugar
1 Gelatine packet (10 grams)
Place water, sugar, lime juice and zest into a saucepan and bring to the boil, turn off heat and allow to cool slightly, then add gelatine and stir.
Strain jelly through a tea strainer and pour jelly on top of rice in glasses.
Use a teaspoon to place strained zest on top of jelly as decoration.
Top with a piece of candied ginger and an Aussie violet flower.

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John and Mary King
ph 07 5435 0074

jrmrk@bytesite.com.au

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ABC Television Programmes feature Finger Limes

'The Cook and The Chef'

Have you seen Maggie Beer and Simon Bryant using finger limes in episodes of their ABC programme, 'The Cook and The Chef'? This great programme is on Wednesdays at 6.30pm on ABC1 with the last episode for 2008 on the 26 November. It will be returning to air on Wednesday 11 February 2009 with a new series.

Even non-cooks enjoy watching this fun couple at work.

It is wonderful to see how enthusiastic they both are about this wonderful native food, and what a great advertisement for our industry.

Maggie and Simon's recipes including 'Oyster, Baked with Native Finger Lime'; Episode 28 August 2008 can be found at www.abc.net.au/tv/cookandchef

'Landline'

"Native limes set to rival macadamias in bush food popularity" was in an episode of Landline back in 2004. See this at - www.abc.net.au/landline.



Scallops with Finger Limes – from 'The Cook and The Chef' featuring Maggie Beer and Simon Bryant on ABC1 television

Serves 2

12 Scallops
Butter and oil for frying
Zest of two limes
Juice of one lime
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil (evoo), or macadamia oil
1 to 2 finger limes, podded (about a dessertspoon of 'pearls')
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
Sprigs of chervil for serving

Finely grate zest of half a lime over scallops, and let sit until ready to cook.

Make vinaigrette by grating the zest of the rest of the limes, and the juice of one lime into a small bowl and season with pepper and salt. Add the oil and mix and leave to stand.

Heat a wide flat pan with butter, and a little oil to stop it burning. Salt the scallops and drop half into the pan to just sear, not crowding the pan and not cooking for long. Take off and drain on absorbent paper and sear the remaining scallops.

Put them all onto the serving plate, drizzle with the vinaigrette, and top with the finger lime pearls, season with pepper and salt and garnish with sprigs of chervil.