

**Plant Profile – Warrigal Greens - Graeme White (Witjuti Grub Bushfood Nursery)**

There are a few species of native plants that can be used as a green vegetable and are referred to, by some, as 'Native Spinach' but this is a rather misleading term and should be avoided. Some are a bit ordinary but there is one that is quite tasty and well worthy of inclusion into our diet.

*Tetragonia tetragonioides* or more commonly known as Warrigal Greens (Botany Bay Greens or New Zealand Spinach) was one of the first native plants recognized for its food potential by Europeans. Captain Cook fed it to his crew to prevent scurvy and Joseph Banks sent the seed to England, in 1772, where it became a popular 'pot herb' there and eventually throughout Europe by the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Naturally occurring over a wide range of soil and climatic conditions, it is common in protected coastal dune areas and on the margins of inland salt marshes, where it may be confused with the species, *T. implexicoma*, which contains far more oxalates, is less tasty and not recommended for food. *T. tetragonioides* makes an excellent and very hardy ground cover but does best in a moist, well drained, shady position.

The leaves are distinctly triangular in shape and the flowers, which can occur throughout most of the year or between August to December in the cooler climates, are yellowish-green and fairly inconspicuous. Depending on the climate, *T. tetragonioides* is either an annual or a short lived perennial. It has a prostrate, sprawling growth habit with a spread of about 2 metres. In warm climates, the new growth tips can be harvested all year but in cooler areas, growth will either slow down or the plant will die back. The seeds however, will set and readily self-sow in the following spring.

The succulent stems and fleshy, angular leaves must be steamed or blanched for at least three minutes in order to remove the soluble oxalates and the water used, discarded. There is no documented evidence that, traditionally, Aboriginal people utilized Warrigal Greens as a source of food. This is not surprising, as the first Australians, being hunter-gatherers, did not practice pot-cooking and therefore it would have been difficult for them to overcome the problem posed by the oxalic acids.

Warrigal Greens are one of the many native food plants that are being grown as a commercial crop, either cultivated conventionally in raised beds or using hydroponic production methods. They are becoming very popular in restaurants and hopefully, in the near future, will be readily available in your local fruit and vege outlet.

In the wild, a good example of *Tetragonia tetragonioides* can be seen on the west bank of Nudgee Creek near the mouth, flourishing in the understorey below the *Avicennia marina* mangroves on a sandy bank enriched by seaweed.

**About oxalates.** Oxalic Acid and its salts are a common component of plant chemistry, but only at significant levels in several families, in the case of *Tetragonia*, Family Azoaceae. Oxalic acid and the calcium and magnesium salts are virtually insoluble; therefore if soluble oxalates are absorbed, crystalline deposits of the insoluble components may well form in the kidney tubules under certain circumstances with undesirable results. The body may also accumulate oxalates from the ingestion of ordinary dietary sources, especially those from the family of beet, spinach and rhubarb, from tropical fruits, from the metabolism of ascorbic acid (vitamin C), from tea and from inadequate hydration. In the case of *Tetragonia*, soluble oxalate in the leaves is easily removed by blanching and discarding the water, leaving the material safe for further preparation as food.

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## Recipes – Warrigal Greens (*Tetragonia tetragonioides*)

### Warrigal Greens & Chicken Roll-ups *by Greg Freney*

4 sheets filo pastry

1 Chicken fillet, butterflied & flattened

Davidson's Plum relish or any good tomato relish/salsa

Fresh Warrigal Greens (young leaves) blanched.

Goat feta cheese

Lay down the pastry sheets, buttered between each one.

Place flattened chicken on pastry & spread with relish.

Place Warrigal Greens over chicken & sprinkle with crumbled feta.

Roll up pastry & fold ends into a package.

Brush package with melted butter & bake on a tray in 180 deg.C to 200 deg.C oven for 30 – 40 minutes or until chicken is cooked.

Serve with your favorite salad.

Can be made without the chicken, just add more Warrigal Greens & feta.

### Potted prawns *by John King*

Serves 4

350g cooked, peeled and diced prawns

finely chopped Kandertal (Citrus glauca, Aussi desert limes), or finger lime globules

pinch dried and finely-ground Aussi herbs

blanched warrigal greens, chop

butter

garnish with thin rings of finger lime

sea salt and pepper to taste, if desired

Toss diced prawns with seasonings, herbs, Kandertal and Warrigal greens.

Pack prawn mixture tightly into four individual ovenproof ramekins, about 6cm in

diameter, and dot each with a tablespoon of butter

Bake ramekins for 10 mins, then remove from oven and pour over enough melted butter to cover prawns. Cool until set.

Serve in ramekins. Garnish.

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Warrigal Greens & flowers – photos by John King

