

Plant Profile - Davidson's Plum - Graeme White & Veronica Cougan

AB and JW Cribb published their book "Wild Food in Australia" in 1975. It was the first book of its kind and it kindled our passion in bushfood plants that eventually inspired us to establish the nursery. In their book the Cribbs describe the Davidson's Plum as "one of the best of the native fruits that we have tried." High praise indeed from a couple who had tasted just about everything the Australian bush had to offer, and lived to write about it. Another bushfood author, Tim Low, has called the 'Davo' the "Queen of Australian rainforest plums." We tend to agree with both.

Specimens of the Davidson's Plum (*Davidsonia pruriens*) were first 'collected' in the 1860's by J.E. Davidson, a pioneer north Queensland sugar grower, hence the boring name. The local Aboriginal people called her 'Ooray', a much more fitting name for a Queen. First botanically described in 1867 by the German botanist, Baron Von Mueller, who originally gave them separate species classification. This was later revised, as both the northern and southern Davidson's Plums were thought to be varieties of the same species, ***Davidsonia pruriens* var. *pruriens*** and ***Davidsonia pruriens* var. *jerseyana*** respectively. They have now been reclassified again as separate species, ie. ***Davidsonia pruriens*** and

Davidsonia jerseyana. More recently a third species has been classified, the rare Smooth Davidson's Plum, ***Davidsonia johnsonii***, from areas around Mt. Warning, of which only a very small number of specimens are known to exist in the wild. A very interesting plant in that the hairless fruit doesn't produce viable seed and can only be propagated from cuttings. Botanists are unable to explain how this species has survived evolution. There is a possible fourth species from North Queensland, a coastal variety with a softer leaf and weeping form but the botanists are still out on that one!

Davidsonia jerseyana occurs naturally in the rainforests of Northern New South Wales, but it is rare in the wild. It is the one most often grown in the garden, not only for its clusters of fruit, interestingly born on the trunk of the plant, but also as a highly ornamental tree, often mulitrunked, with long drooping pinnate leaves. Resembling a cross between a small palm and a tree fern, it grows to a height of 4 to 5 metres. The crown of the tree flushes frequently with velvety pink new growth. Individual small pink flowers appear in late winter to early spring, followed by the fruit between November and February. The north Queensland ***Davidsonia pruriens*** is of similar habit but a slightly larger tree to about 10 metres, which

bears larger fruit on panicles between March and July, in the sub-tropics. *Pruriens* means 'causing irritation' referring to the fine hairs on the fruit which can be easily wiped off with a cloth.

Both species are highly decorative and make superb potted indoor plants, being able to adapt to low light conditions. In the garden, the Davidson's plum prefers a well drained site, protected from strong winds. *D. pruriens* can stand quite a bit more exposure than *D. jerseyana*. Mulching, regular applications of fertiliser and adequate watering, especially at the time of fruit set will ensure a bountiful crop of plump ripe 'plums'.

Whatever *Davidsonia* species you choose, they are all magnificent garden specimens that bear prolific clusters of deep purple plum like fruit, each between 30 to 50mm in diameter. Strongly flavoured, the rich dark red flesh of the 'plums' is quite tangy to say the least. Eaten fresh they will certainly stimulate your taste buds. Their delicious flavour and acidity make them a very versatile fruit in the kitchen, lending themselves to be used in jams, tarts, sauces, both sweet and savory and desserts. Even a quite respectable full bodied red wine can be made from this 'Queen of the rainforest'. On its own or blended with the native tamarind, we can honestly say that the Davidson's plum makes one

of the best jams.

The following recipe makes a sauce that is great served hot or cold over pancakes, crepes, waffles and ice-cream etc.

Sweet Davidson's Plum Sauce

(makes 3 cups)

6 Davidson's plums, seeds removed and finely chopped

1 cup water

2 cups orange juice

¼ cup castor sugar

2 sticks cinnamon

1 cup port

½ cup honey

In a medium sized stainless-steel saucepan, combine the plums, water, orange juice, sugar and cinnamon sticks. Place over a medium heat and gently simmer for 20 minutes. Remove from the heat, discard the cinnamon sticks and puree the sauce. Return the sauce to the saucepan. At this stage, add the port and honey and simmer gently for a further 5 minutes or until the sauce has the desired smooth consistency.

Enjoy the Wild taste of the Rainforest.....

Recipe: Ooray Beef with Lemon Myrtle Rice: by John R King

Six large or 12 small *Davidsonia* plums

½ cup water

Cut the plums and simmer in water for 5 min. and allow to cool. When the plums are cool press into a strainer collecting the juice in a saucepan.

250g gravy beef or kangaroo

Thinly slice gravy beef or kangaroo and add to the plum juice to marinate for a couple of hours or overnight (covered).

5 cups water

1 cup Jasmine or white rice

6 dried lemon Myrtle leaves (*Backhousia citriodora*)

In a separate saucepan put the water, rice and add the lemon myrtle leaves. Bring to the boil and simmer for 15 minutes. Drain rice in colander and reserve rice water.

1 tabsp Macadamia nut oil

Add the Macadamia oil to a wok, heat and start stir-frying the drained beef or roo.

In a separate saucepan combine marinade and 2 cups of rice water, reduce down on high heat to 1 or 2 cups of liquid. Start

slowly and "watch" as it will foam over at first, so heat needs to be adjusted as liquid reduces.

1 clove garlic

1 cup coconut cream

2 tabsp raw sugar

1 tabsp potato flour mixed with 1 tabsp water

When reduced add garlic, coconut cream and raw sugar.

Stir and simmer for a few minutes, and then add a mixture of potato flour and water, stir and simmer a few minutes to thicken. Put aside.

Carrots, celery, shallot, capsicum, egg-plant (or your choice of vegetables)

Wash and scrape some carrots and cut thinly. Add carrot and celery slices to meat and cook until soft. Add diced shallot and capsicum and thin-sliced egg-plant. When vegetables are cooked to your liking add 1 cup of thickened sauce to wok and heat through.

Place Lemon Myrtle Rice on plates and surround with the *Davidsonia* plum (Ooray) Beef. Serves 2-3.