

Bush Tucker Plants

by Jan Sked

Australian Native Limes (*Citrus* species)

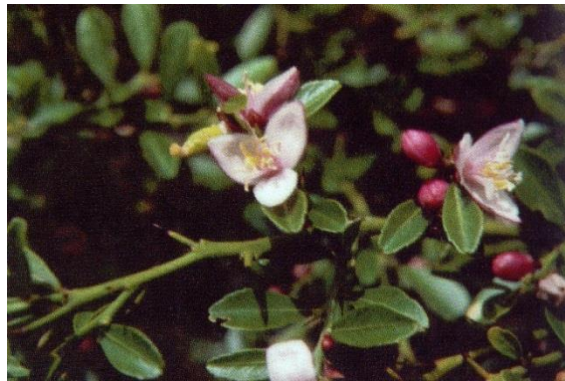
Native limes occur in the warm regions of Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia and, until recently, were included in the genera of *Microcitrus* and *Eremocitrus*. All have now been included in the larger genus of *Citrus*.

As a child I grew up amongst the mountain rainforests of the Gold Coast Hinterland. Scattered about the cleared paddocks of our property were dense spiky clumps that were native finger limes. One of my great joys was picking the fruits of these limes, biting off the tips and squeezing out the bright crunchy beads of juice that filled my mouth with a delicious sharp limey flavour.

The **Finger Lime (*Citrus australasica*)** is a shrub or small tree with small, glossy, dark green leaves on very thorny branches. Leaf margins are variable and may be entire or scalloped or toothed.

Small, fragrant white to pinkish flowers are produced mainly in autumn, followed by these wonderful finger-shaped fruits, 5cm-8cm long, which can be yellow to yellowish-green to dark green, almost black. There is one variety (*C. australasica* var. *sanguinea*) which has a reddish-purplish skin.

The fleshy pulp is in small globular segments with an appearance similar to caviar. These segments can be squeezed from the fruit and eaten fresh, used in drinks, marmalades, cakes, desserts or other recipes, or used as a tasty and decorative garnish to cooking. Fruits mature in winter and spring.



Citrus australasica flowers



Citrus australasica fruit

The Finger Lime occurs in the subtropical rainforest regions of south-east Queensland and north-eastern NSW.

Plants can tolerate light frosts, but appreciate watering during extended dry periods. They respond well to light pruning, which will encourage bushy growth. On my father's property the pruning was done by cattle, which is why we had such dense bushy plants.

New cultivars of the Finger Lime have been developed by the CSIRO and are available for home gardeners.

The **Round Lime, *Citrus australis***, is a small tree to about 5 metres in height, often densely foliated, with stiff, oval, dark green, glossy leaves, 0.5-5cm long, that are sometimes slightly scalloped towards the ends. Leaves can be very variable in size and shape and have a lovely citrus odour when crushed. There are strong sharp thorns in the leaf axils.

Fragrant white flowers are produced singly or occasionally in small clusters in the leaf axils in winter. Fruits are round and green, occasionally bright yellow, up to 5cm across, like an unripe orange with a bumpy surface. They ripen in late spring and summer. These fruits are good for making marmalade and for citrus drinks.



Citrus australis flowers



Citrus australis fruit



Citrus australis fruit cut in half

Round Lime occurs naturally in lowland rainforests and along watercourses in south-east Queensland. They can be found in the rainforest remnants of the Pine Rivers District.

Plants will grow in sun or shade in well mulched soils, and can be kept as container plants. They are very slow growing and will benefit from light applications of fertilizer and additional water in dry periods.

Another native lime is the **Australian Desert Lime, *Citrus glauca***. This occurs naturally in more arid regions of inland Qld, NSW and SA. Plants can grow from 2 metres to 7 metres tall with small dark green leaves and reddish new tips on spiny stems. In the wild they tend to sucker and can develop into spiny thickets.

Small sweetly scented white to greenish flowers, about 1cm across, are produced in winter and spring. These are followed by small, rounded, juicy green fruits up to 2cm across which are produced about Christmas time and into late summer.



Citrus glauca flower



Citrus glauca fruit

These plants are well-suited to container cultivation. I have grown a grafted one in a container, but later gave it to a friend who has it growing successfully in his garden.

Apart from the species described, there are two other native citrus which are found in north Queensland – **C. garrawayi** (Mt. White Lime) and **C. inodora** (Russell River Lime). There is also a recently described citrus in the monsoon thickets of the Northern Territory, **Citrus gracilis** (Kakadu Lime).

As I have not grown these species, I will leave others to describe them.

Lemon Myrtle ***Backhousia citriodora***

Pronounced: back-HOW-zee-a sit-re-oh-DOOR-a

Backhousia citriodora belongs in the Myrtaceae family. Known most commonly these days as Lemon Myrtle, it has also had several other common names – Lemon-scented Myrtle, Lemon-scented Ironwood and Sweet Verbena. The botanical name *Backhousia* is after James Backhouse (1794-1869), a nurseryman at York, England, a plant collector and a Quaker missionary. The specific name, *citriodora*, means lemon-scented.

Backhousia citriodora occurs naturally in the coastal forests of central and southern Queensland, from Brisbane to Mackay.

It is a small growing tree, about 6-8 metres in cultivation. In open situations the foliage is very dense right to the ground. The opposite, leathery, mid-green leaves, 5-10cm long, have a wonderful lemon fragrance when crushed. Young leaves and branchlets are pale green and softly hairy.

Mature leaves, when added to a pot of tea, impart a lovely lemon flavour. Leaves can be used either fresh or dried. The oil, when distilled, is used by the pharmaceutical, cosmetic and food industries. Lemon Myrtle has become one of the most popular of our bush foods.

In spring the tree is massed with heads of creamy-white flowers with numerous fluffy stamens. These flowers are loved by butterflies.



The fruit is a nut-like capsule which contains several small seeds. These are occasionally released, but are generally retained until the whole fruit falls from the tree.

It is quite hardy in most situations and reasonably frost tolerant, but would benefit from a bit of protection during the establishment phase.

Backhousia citriodora makes a very attractive specimen tree or screening plant for the garden and will tolerate considerable sun as well as a variety of soils including poor clays.

Often in cultivation small branches take root where they touch the ground. These branches are easily severed and can be potted up to provide additional plants. It can also be grown from seed or cuttings, which are best taken in November when the plant has new growth. They may be a little slow to strike.

This plant is well worth a place in every garden.

One of the most popular uses for *Backhousia citriodora* in my family is as the basis for what we call Byron's Party Punch. This Lemon Myrtle Syrup is added to the usual punch ingredients to make a quite uniquely flavoured punch. I first made this for my son Byron's 21st birthday and later for his wedding reception. Since then it has become a staple at all our parties.

To make lemon myrtle sugar syrup:

Put 2.5 litres of hot water and 2½ cups of sugar into a large saucepan and stir until sugar is dissolved. Add about 40 or more lemon myrtle leaves, which can be torn to release the flavour. Bring to the boil and simmer for about 15 minutes. Allow to sit until cool. When syrup has cooled, remove the lemon myrtle leaves and pour syrup into a large bottle or sealable container and store in refrigerator.

Warrigal Greens ***Tetragonia tetragonioides***

Pronounced: tet-ra-GO-nee-a tet-ra-go-nee-OID-eez

Tetragonia tetragonioides belongs in the Aizoaceae family, that also contains *Carpobrotus glaucescens* known as Pigface or Angular Sea Fig which is also a native bush food. *T. tetragonioides* is known most commonly as Warrigal Greens, but also as Botany Bay Spinach or New Zealand Spinach.

The botanical name *Tetragonia* is from the Greek *tetra*, four, and *gonia*, angle, alluding to the four-angled fruit of some species. The specific name *tetragonioides* means resembling *Tetragonia*.

This is a low-growing, spreading, soft-leaved herb that has a distinctive appearance. The fleshy stems and triangular leaves are covered with liquid-filled small pustules. These leaves are 2-9cm long.



It is a widespread species found mainly in coastal sand dunes and tidal areas, but also in inland areas in eastern Australia and south-west Western Australia. Also found in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. There is an abundance of Warrigal Greens growing in the tidal area of the John Oxley Reserve at Murrumba Downs.

Plants will grow in a variety of soils in full sun or partial shade. They will spread rapidly, but should be replanted every couple of years, as they are not long-lived. Makes a good container plant.

Propagate from seed or cuttings.



Warrigal Greens in my garden growing with Native Mint

Warrigal Greens have become popular in bush tucker cookery where they are used as a vegetable. However, stems and leaves must be blanched before eating to remove soluble oxalates and salt. This is done by plunging the leaves into boiling water for 3-4 minutes and then draining. This water should be discarded. They can then be boiled like spinach, which they resemble. Choose only the light green leaves for eating.

WARRIGAL GREENS PIE

Pastry:

- 1½ cups wholemeal flour
- 1 teaspoon vegetable salt
- 1½ cups wheat germ
- 4 tablespoons margarine
- cold water

Sift flour and salt, fold in wheat germ. Rub in margarine. Mix with enough cold water to form a stiff dough. Roll out half pastry and line a 9 inch (23cm) pie plate.

Filling:

- 1 cup chopped cooked warrigal greens
- 500g potatoes (cooked and mashed)
- 250g cottage cheese
- ½ teaspoon basil
- ¼ teaspoon mixed herbs
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon vegetable salt

Mix all ingredients together and fill into pie shell. Roll out remainder of pastry to cover pie dish. Make two slits in top. Bake at 200°C for 15 minutes. Reduce to 175°C and cook a further 15-20 minutes.

Wild Raspberries

Rubus species

Raspberries belong to the vast genus *Rubus* in the family Rosaceae. *Rubus* species are found all over the world, especially in the northern hemisphere. All *Rubus* species, as far as I know, have edible fruits, but there is a lot of variation between species in their flavour and succulence. A notable feature of *Rubus* species is their very prickly stems and even the leaves.

In Queensland we have the majority of native *Rubus* species, probably because we have the most rainforest and raspberries usually grow on the edges of rainforest. Here in the Moreton Bay Region we have several *Rubus* species, but the ones I consider the best for eating are ***Rubus probus*** and ***Rubus rosifolius***.

Rubus probus is a suckering, multi-stemmed, shrub with very prickly, arching/climbing green stems that can reach up to 3 metres in length. The pinnate leaves are bright green, thin-textured, sparsely hairy, with 6-12 serrated edged leaflets, up to 8cm long.

Showy, white, 5-petaled flowers, 2.5cm across, are produced throughout the year.



***Rubus probus* flower and foliage**

These are followed by globular red berries, up to 2.5cm diameter, which are edible, juicy and delicious.



***Rubus probus* foliage, flowers, fruit**

R. probus is found in sheltered gullies, rainforest margins and moist cleared areas of forest from north-eastern to south-eastern Queensland.

Rubus rosifolius (Rose-leaved Raspberry). This is a very similar species, although not as robust as *R. probus*. It is a suckering multi-stemmed shrub to about 1.5 metres, with thorny, hairy, arching, semi-climbing, green stems. The thin-textured, pinnate leaves, have 5-7 serrated-edged leaflets to 7cm long.

White, 5-petalled flowers, 1.5-2.5cm across, are produced all year round.



***Rubus rosifolius* foliage and flower**

The red, succulent, edible fruits are somewhat conical in shape, longer than they are wide. They are not quite as flavoursome or juicy as *R. probus*, but still very nice to eat.



***Rubus rosifolius* foliage, flower and fruit**

This species is very widespread, extending from China and Taiwan to southern Australia. In Queensland it occurs from the NSW border to as far north as Kroombit Tops. It is quite common in the Moreton Bay Region.

Why not try growing some of these native raspberries. They are not be ideal for beside the driveway or along pathways, but they would make a good hedge or fill in a sunny spot on the edge of a rainforest planting.

These raspberries are light loving, and will flower and fruit best in full sun. They do like a reasonable amount of moisture and they don't like poorly drained soil. They respond well to pruning, so you can keep

them to whatever space you have available, and the big bonus of course is that they will bear edible fruits for you.

They are readily propagated by cuttings. I have not tried raising them from seed.

Raspberry bushes grew in profusion on the edges of the rainforest and in patches of cleared scrub where I grew up in the Gold Coast Hinterland. In raspberry season we collected the bright red fruits by the bucketful.

A favourite dessert was raspberries and cream. First wash the raspberries and remove any ants. Then place in a bowl, sprinkle with caster sugar and pour over fresh cream. Delicious!

Riberry ***Syzygium luehmannii***

Pronounced: siz-ID-gee-um loo-MAN-ee-eye

Syzygium luehmannii is a member of the large Myrtaceae family. It is known by a number of common names, such as Small-leaved Lilly Pilly and Cherry Satinash, but Riberry is the name used in the bush foods industry.

The botanical name *Syzygium* is from the Greek *syzygos*, a joining or yoking together, because in some species petals join to form a cap, which is shed as the flower expands. The specific name *luehmannii* is after J.G. Luehmann, secretary to Baron Ferdinand von Mueller and later Government Botanist.

This is a decorative plant all year round. It is a slender tree with a dense, bushy crown of glossy, lance-shaped leaves, 4-5cm long, drawn out to a long point. Young foliage changes from a rich bronze to a luminous pink, giving the appearance of a mass of blossom, and is its most attractive feature.



Small, fluffy white flowers are produced in clusters in spring, followed by pretty, bright pink, pear-shaped berries, about 1.5cm long, which ripen in summer.



These fruits are edible and are very popular in the bush tucker industry. They have a wonderful acidic, sweetish, spicy flavour, that is better in cooked dishes than when eaten raw. They are excellent to use in jams, jellies, desserts, sauces (sweet and savoury), and pickles. They are best used whole, as many of the fruits do not contain seeds. If seeds are present the fruit can be pureed and the seeds eaten. They impart a nutty texture and are quite edible. Ribberries can be stored very successfully, simply by placing in sealed plastic bags or containers in the freezer. They can then be used straight from the freezer when required.

Riberry is an ideal specimen tree or screening plant and good in a container. It occurs naturally in rainforests from Cooktown to Kempsey in New South Wales. Will grow well in most soils in sun or shade, but prefers to be well mulched. It grows to about 8 metres in cultivation. Propagate from fresh seed.

SAVOURY RIBERRY SAUCE

Ingredients:

- 1 cup water
- 1 onion (chopped)
- 2½ cups ribberries
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon native pepper
- 2 teaspoons ground dried lemon myrtle
- 2 teaspoon minced fresh ginger
- ⅓ cup port

Place water, onion, ribberries, sugar, cinnamon and peppercorns into a saucepan. Bring to boil and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove from heat and puree until smooth.

Return to saucepan, add lemon myrtle, ginger and port and simmer for another 5 minutes, stirring frequently.

Serve hot over chicken, pork, beef or lamb.

It is probably quite good served cold over cold meats, but I haven't tried it that way. May be kept refrigerated.