

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

AUSTRALIAN FOOD PLANTS STUDY GROUP.

Newsletter No.8 FEB.1990.

Dear Members,

Welcome to the first newsletter of 1990! Perhaps we should start with introductions. The Rockhampton Branch of the Society for Growing Australian Plants has about 50 financial members, but not all of these live in or near the city (pop. approx. 56,000, situated on the Fitzroy River astride the Tropic of Capricorn), so our number of active members is considerably less. Meetings are usually held on the 4th Friday of the month (except December), and excursions on the 1st Sunday (except January). Visitors are welcome at any activity. My home phone no. is 079-282862 should you wish to make contact.

Many of our members have a keen interest in the edible qualities of the local plants, and it is from this core that the Study Group Sub-Committee is drawn. Branch Treasurer Mrs. Aileen Moorhead has agreed to act as Study Group Treasurer, Eric Anderson is helping edit the newsletter, and I'm the general overseer ("Leader" in the official language, which is not strictly accurate!).

However, we need your assistance in building up a data pool available to all members. Could you contact us with information about what Australian plants you are growing and eating (and which parts), and your comments on same. We also need copy for the newsletter (book reviews, recipes, propagation hints, etc.), which we hope to issue about 3 times a year, as a way of keeping members in touch.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Lenore Lindsay (Mrs.) for Rockhampton S.G.A.P.

EXCURSION REPORTS:

On 5th of November, 1989, Rocky SGAP travelled to "Melrose", the home of members Nev. and Kath. Mills. This grazing property is situated at Morinish, about 70 km. N-W of Rockhampton on the Fitzroy. We looked in detail at 2 areas-- "Sandy Camp" which is a vine scrub remnant, and a limestone outcrop --and concluded the day with an inspection of the extensive homestead gardens and arboretum.

Between 70 and 80 native and naturalized specimens were identified in the wild, many in flower and/or fruit. The Current Bushes (*Carissa ovata*) and Sandpaper Figs (*Ficus opposita*) carried heavy crops of edible and palatable fruit. Red Ash (*Alphitonia excelsa*), one of the trees with many medicinal uses, was also fruiting prolifically. Other plants having edible parts, but not in season, included *Brachychiton australe*, *B. rupestre*, *Citriobatus spinescens*, *Dianella* sp., *Eustrephus latifolius*, *Exocarpus latifolius*, *Ficus platypoda*, *Hibiscus heterophyllus*, *Opuntia* sp., *Passiflora foetida*, *Pleiogynum timorense*, *Santalum lanceolatum* and *Sterculia quadrifida*.

The first field trip for 1990 was to Rosslyn Head National Park on 4th February. In spite of the hot, dry and dusty conditions, some food plants were observed. Many Scrub Cherry trees (*Exocarpus latifolius*) carried delicious ripe fruit. These are at their best when soft and purplish, and superb when they've begun to wrinkle like natural sultanas. The fruits of Tree Zamia (*Cycas media*) and Grey Mangrove (*Avicennia marina*) require much preparation to render them safe and palatable respectively. We've never eaten *Cycas*, but *Avicennia* "seeds" taste like incredibly bitter olives.

#### MEMBERS' GARDENS:

In Central Q'l'd it has been a bumper year for lillypillies! Both cultivated and wild trees have borne heavy crops, and even after the birds, possums, flying foxes and local kids have had their fill, much fruit has simply fallen. Dedicated SGAP members, of course, have done their share of eating, so here's a rundown of comments.

*Syzygium australe*: This is the local creek lillypilly. It's a lovely specimen tree in the garden, with pink new foliage, masses of fluffy cream flowers, and small, bright pink, pear shaped berries. These fruits are pleasant eaten raw, with a crisp texture and lemony tart flavour. This year I made jelly and wine. The jelly is dark pinky red and very sweet. The wine is still fermenting.

*Syzygium fibrosum*: Another good garden tree, with orange/pink new growth and very attractive, dense, glossy green foliage. It would probably make a good hedge. The fruits are bright pinky red, globular or depressed globular, with obvious calyx remnants. Fruit from the garden specimens sampled was seedless, which raises some interesting questions re propagation, but makes preparation for cooking easy. The flesh is crisp, aromatic, slightly astringent. Women seem to like it more than men. Particularly interesting when included in a fruit salad.

*Syzygium luehmannii*: A very popular garden tree, with striking bright pink new foliage, white or cream blossom, and small, almost cone shaped red fruits. These are probably the least palatable of the locally cultivated varieties, as the aromatic and astringent properties are very strong. I made jam this year. It looks very attractive, has quite an interesting taste, but is not really one I'd recommend for mass production.

*Syzygium wilsonii*: A very unusual small tree for a shady corner in a frost free garden. Flowers are large, dark red, fluffy pompoms, followed by bunches of white globular berries. Again, the fruit is interesting rather than useful, but is highly recommended as an ornamental.

Lastly, 2 very palatable varieties from a member's property at Byfield, north of Yeppoon. Identification is only tentative, but doesn't curtail one's enjoyment of the fruit.

Syzygium paniculatum (?): Fluffy white flowers are followed by 2cm. pinky red ovoid fruits containing a large round seed. The fruit is delicious, with no trace of the astringency that can detract from other lillypillies. The trees are common along the creek banks.

Syzygium coolminianum (?): Round blue fruits, again without astringency. Crisp, sweet and delicious.

Also just finishing bearing is an exotic fruit known as the Wax Jambu (Syzygium samarangense), like a giant pink *S. australe* 8-10 cm. long. This is really delicious, - crisp and juicy - and is an indication of how lillypillies could develop with selective breeding.

#### RECIPES:

The general rule for either jam or jelly making is a cup of juice/fruit to a cup of sugar. However, I find that setting can be a problem, as it is with most soft fruits. Therefore extra pectin needs to be added. This can be as one of the commercial preparations, or in the form of lemon juice or cooking apples. Only experimenting can tell you which will give the best results for a particular fruit. I have found lemon juice successful, but rather overpowering when making up lillypillies, particularly when dealing with *S. australe* which already has a lemony tang. (Not that there's anything wrong with lemon jelly!) Granny Smith apples added to the lillypillies are good.

#### LILLYPILLY JELLY (1):

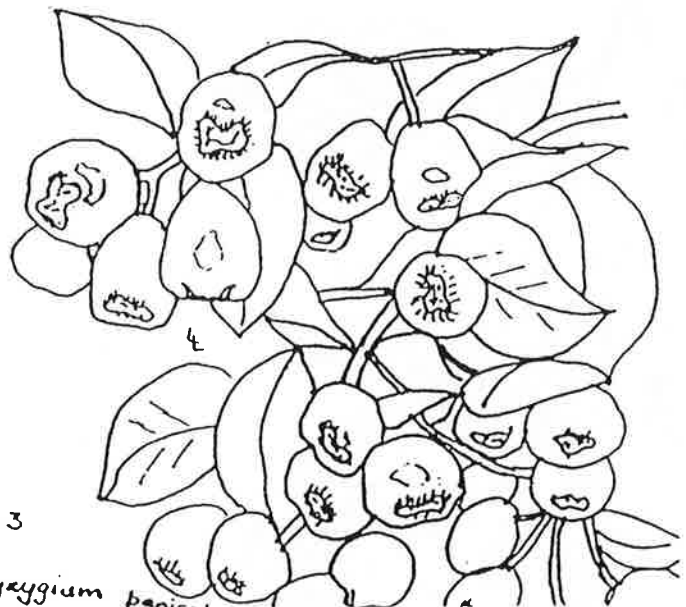
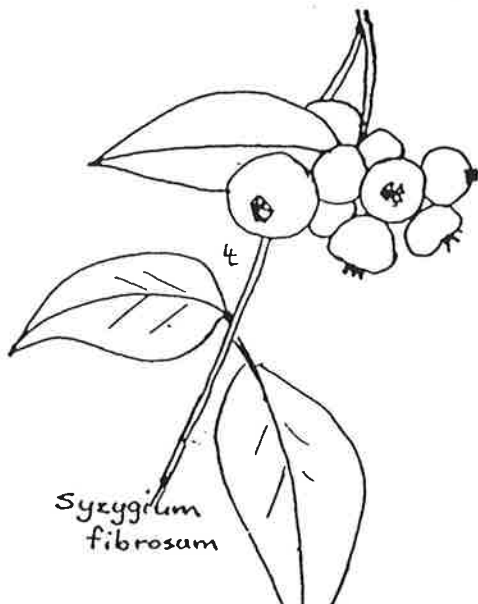
Wash fruit, just cover with cold water, boil 1 hour, press, strain. Allow 1 cup heated sugar and 1 dessertspoon lemon juice to each cup juice. Cook quickly till it jellies.

#### LILLYPILLY JELLY (2):

Equal quantities of lillypillies and green apples. Wash, cut up whole apples including skin and core, cover with water, boil till soft, press, strain. Allow 1 lb. warmed sugar to every pint of juice. Boil rapidly till it jellies.

#### LILLYPILLY JELLY (3):

Follow directions given with commercial powdered pectin. If no instructions, pectin from the chemist is used in the ratio of 1:100. That is for every cup of juice, use 1 cup sugar and 1/2 teaspoon pectin. Make up in the usual way.



EDIBLE SPECIMENS TABLED AT MEETINGS:

2.2.90

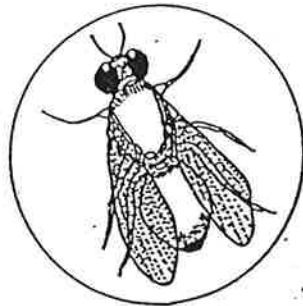
Davidsonia pruriens, Eleagnus latifolius, Freycinetia propinqua, Hibiscus heterophyllus, Macadamia integrifolia, Nelumbo nucifera, Pandanus sp., Pipturus argenteus, Syzygium wilsonii.

23.2.90

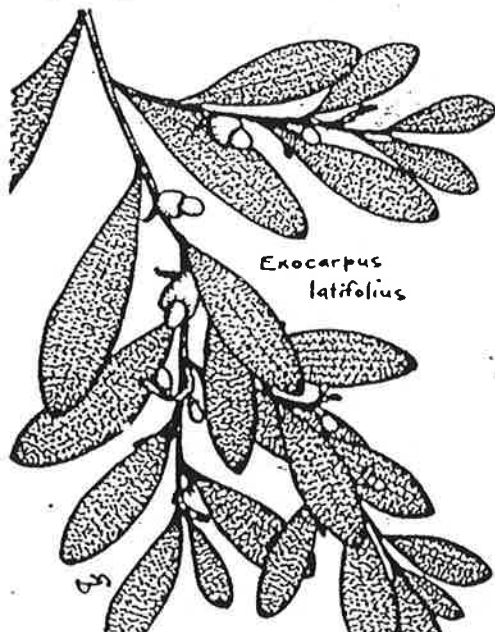
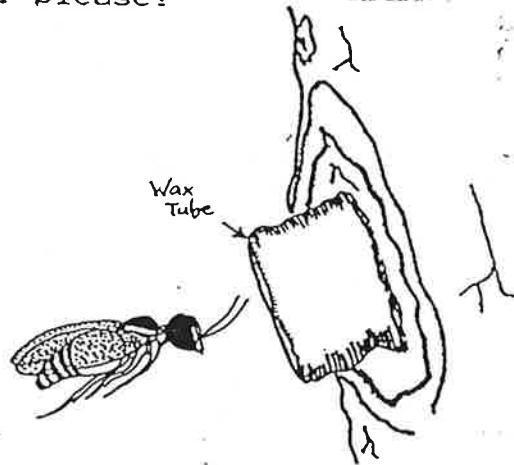
Cordia sp. (a soft, orange, teardrop shaped berry, reasonably palatable, resembling a cross between persimmon and mango. Q'L'D Herbarium was unable to identify the specimen.)  
Eugenia reinwardtiana, Hibiscus heterophyllus, Syzygium oleosum.

SUGAR BAG:

Though not strictly speaking a plant food, honey from the native Australian bees is near enough to justify a mention here. On February 17th we robbed the hive in our yard of about 800 gm of its thin, strongly flavoured, smoky lemon honey. The wax is dark brown, very aromatic, and pliable. The hive is in a couple of hollow cement bricks covered by a piece of wood which we can remove to gain access. They seem to prefer this to the hollow logs etc. we've tried to coax them into at various times. We're not sure if the strong lemon flavour is usual, or if it's the result of the bees collecting from the Backhousia citriodora nearby. Any info. please?



Moonga Jooroo,  
*Trigona hockingsi* magnified x 6.



*Exocarpus latifolius*