



Native herbs and vegetables with potential in SA

Miscellaneous native food crops

Introduction

Along with the 'major' native food crops, such as quandong, native citrus, muntries and wattleseed – which are covered by individual fact sheets - there are a number of other native herb and salad food plants with potential for increased production in South Australia, if markets can be secured.

Four of the more significant of these crops are described in this publication – Warrigal Spinach, Sea Parsley, Slender Mint and Wild Basil.

Warrigal Spinach (*Tetragonia tetragonoides*)

Description

Also known as New Zealand Spinach and Warrigal Greens, it is an annual, rambling ground cover plant. The large angular leaves are emerald-green and semi-succulent and are used much like English Spinach, as a flavoursome salad or hot vegetable, in gratins, pastas, quiches, and for stuffing meats. It was the first Australian food plant to be grown in Europe where it became a popular summer spinach in England and America.

It occurs naturally in coastal areas of Qld, NSW, Vic, SA and WA, and semi-arid to arid areas adjacent to inland waterways and depressions, under wide range of rainfall conditions.

Leaves contain water soluble oxalates, which should be eaten in moderation. For this reason it is recommended that leaves be blanched for 1 minute in rapidly boiling water (which should be discarded), then plunged into cold water and refreshed before use.

Production

Although increasing, current national demand for Warrigal Spinach is limited and would be satisfied by a few intensively managed hectares.

Hardy and vigorous, it prefers lighter textured soils and requires adequate water and nutrition for rapid growth over summer. Slow growth rates produces a bitter taste in the leaves.



Fig 1. Warrigal spinach leaves

Sea Parsley (*Apium prostratum*)

Description

Biennial or perennial prostrate growing herb to 1 m diameter. Broad-leaf form has glossy green leaves the size and shape of parsley. Narrow-leaf form has celery-shaped and sized leaves. Small clusters of insignificant white/cream flowers for long periods through Summer and Autumn.

It occurs naturally in coastal foreshore areas and some inland waterways of Qld, NSW, Vic, SA and WA.

The intense parsley flavoured leaves may be picked at any time of the year. Leaves are used as a garnish or to flavour salads, soups, seafoods, stews and casseroles.



Fig 2. Sea parsley

Production

Although this crop appears to have potential, current use is largely experimental. It is an adaptable species for lighter textured soils. Broad leaf form will withstand full sun exposure but produces better quality leaves if receiving some shade. Narrow leaved form prefers a shaded position. Withstands full coastal foreshore exposure. Tolerates moderate frosts and alkaline soil conditions. Requires adequate water to produce well.

Slender Mint (*Mentha diemenica*)

Description

Slender Mint (*Mentha diemenica*) is a perennial prostrate herb with a dense mat-forming habit, strong scent/flavour, and profusion of mauve coloured flowers during the warmer months. Its small oval-shaped leaves (to 20 mm) yield a strong mint aroma when crushed.

The wild forms of Slender Mint occur naturally in all states of Australia, though it is rarely seen. It is generally found in moist places along streams, rivers or swamps on a wide range of soil types from lower rainfall areas (400 mm) to coastal and alpine regions.

Slender Mint is a strong culinary herb with a unique "spearmint" flavour. It is generally used sparingly to provide a subtle flavour.



Fig 3. Slender mint

Production

Slender Mint is a hardy, fast growing adaptable herb preferring a sunny, moderately watered to damp position. It grows on alkaline and acidic soils, tolerates frosts, and during droughts will die back to its underground rhizomes to re-emerge rapidly after rains.

Wild Basil (*Ocimum americanum*)

Description

Wild Basil is a compact perennial shrubby herb, usually 300 to 600 mm high under cultivation. The rounded leaves are covered with very fine hairs, and when crushed release a powerful aroma similar to common Basil, but unique to this species. It produces sprays of purple, lavender-like flowers to 80 mm long during the warmer months.

Wild Basil occurs in the drier regions of central, coastal and inland Qld, usually along water courses, under a wide range of rainfall and soil conditions.

Leaves may be picked at any time of the year and are used as a garnish, or to flavour salads, soups, stews, casseroles, and in pesto. When soaked in water the seeds swell into a gelatinous mass and can be used to thicken and flavour soups, or as an ingredient in sweet, cooling beverages.

Fig 4. Wild basil



Production

Wild Basil is a fast growing herb which thrives on a wide range of soils. It prefers a sunny and moderately watered position and benefits from a handful of organic fertiliser (eg. Blood and Bone) in the bottom of the hole at planting (not in direct contact with the roots), and frequent side dressings during the growing season.

Potential returns

It is too early to estimate the potential returns, yields and production costs for these species under cultivation in South Australia. Currently, wholesalers pay in the range of \$5/kg for fresh Warrigal Spinach.

Further information

Further information on native crops is contained in the other publications in this series:

Australian Native Citrus – Wild Species, Cultivars and Hybrids

Bush Tomato Production

Miscellaneous Native Food Crops – Davidson and Illawarra Plums

Miscellaneous Native Food Crops – East Coast Tree Species with Potential in SA

Miscellaneous Native Food Crops – Herbs and Vegetables with Potential in SA

Mountain Pepper Production

Muntries Production

Native Food Background Notes

Native Food Crops – Frequently Asked Questions

Native Food Crops – Sources of Information

Quandong Production

Sunrise Lime Dieback

The Native Food Industry in SA

These fact sheets are also available for download from the Australian Native Produce Industries website at www.anpi.com.au

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