

BUSHFOOD

Native Limes



Finger lime (*Citrus australasica*)

Queensland Bushfood
Association

Images Graeme White



Round lime (*Citrus australis*)

EXOTIC *Citrus* species were first introduced into Australia in 1788 by members of the First Fleet, however it was not for another 100 years that colonial botanists had 'discovered' that there were several species of *Citrus* indigenous to Australia. Aborigines have traditionally included native citrus fruit as part of their diet for thousands of years, however the European settlers only started to recognise their potential during the mid 19th century and began using the strange fruit to make jams, cordials and desserts.

There are in fact six native *Citrus* species, four of which occur in the rainforests of the east coast from Cape York to northern New South Wales. The other two are unique members of the citrus family (Rutaceae) in that they are the only ones that naturally occur in a semi-arid environment. Native limes

were, until recently, classified under the genus *Microcitrus* due to the relatively small size of their flowers and fruit but now have been re-classified as true *Citrus*.


Of the four rainforest species, two occur in South East Queensland. They are the Finger Lime (*Citrus australasica*) and the Round Lime (*Citrus australis*), also known as the Gympie Lime or by its Aboriginal name, Dooja.

The Finger Lime is found in the wild from the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales to Mt Tamborine and is probably the best known of the native limes. The fruit is unusual in a number of respects, it is finger shaped, or cylindrical to be more precise, and the pulp of the fruit can vary in colour from yellow to green to pale pink through to crimson and has the unique characteristic of having separate juice vesicles that have the appearance of caviar. When eaten these vesicles burst pleasantly at slight

pressure from the teeth to provide a welcome refreshing sensation on the tongue. With a little initial pruning, the Finger Lime forms a compact shrub in the garden but being quite prickly it is a bit of a challenge harvesting the fruit. This is where a pair of long handled BBQ tongs comes in handy.

The Round Lime, occurring on the drier margins of the Araucarian vine forests from Brisbane north to Gympie, is the most vigorous of the native citrus, growing to a small, bushy but thorny tree, to about 5m in cultivation. This species flowers in spring, then between March and April bears golf ball sized fruit with rough thick skin. The fruit contains a pleasantly acid juice, dryer than the Tahitian Lime but the zest is full of flavour due to the presence of abundant aromatic oils, making it the most adaptable of the native limes in the kitchen.

Both species will adapt to a wide range of soil types and will fruit well in semi-shade, although they will produce a more prolific crop in full sun. Growth should be encouraged in spring, not autumn, by applications of an organic fertiliser in late winter or spring that will also minimise insect pest predation. For optimum fruit-set water these trees regularly from late winter through to summer. Their growth habits make them a sanctuary for small birds, and being of the Rutaceae family, they attract several species of the magnificent swallowtail butterfly. >>



Selection of native limes.



The other two northern rainforest limes are the Mount White Lime (*Citrus garawayi*) from Cape York Peninsula and the Russel River Lime (*Citrus inodora*), which grows in lowland rainforest at the foot of the Bellenden Ker range, not far from Cairns. Both species are rare in their native habitats and specimens can be difficult to obtain.

Native citrus that occur in semi-arid regions are the Desert Lime (*Citrus glauca*) and the recently described, *Citrus gracilis*, from near Humpty Doo, the Northern Territory. The Desert Lime is an extremely popular and versatile bushfood with its refreshing tangy taste.

Plants are readily available and are an ideal choice for the drier areas but it is doubtful that they would do well in a humid coastal environment.

Native limes are all slow to establish from seedlings but there are grafted selections of the more popular species available. While they are more expensive, they will bear fruit in 1 or 2 years as opposed to 5 or 6 with seedling stock. Be aware that there is a number of native lime hybrids on the market. While they may be interesting specimens in themselves, they are not true bushfoods in the original sense.

Australian indigenous foods, while sometimes reminiscent of 'traditional' foods, have their own unique characteristics and flavours that we need to learn to accept and appreciate – only then can we develop a truly Australian cuisine.

Enjoy the Wild Taste of the Rainforest!

Wild Dooja Lime Cream Rice with Wild Dooja Lime Jelly

Cream Rice

1 ½ cups boiling water
1 cup jasmine rice
3 fresh Tasmanian Pepper leaves or 1 teaspoon ground leaf
1 cup milk
1 can condensed sweetened skim milk
½ cup Dooja Lime pulp
100 grams candied ginger pieces sliced thin

Add rice to boiling water, turn heat to low and simmer 10 minutes. Add other ingredients, bring back to boil and turn off. Put lid on saucepan and leave for 20 minutes. Remove whole pepper leaves, spoon rice into glasses and set aside.

Dooja Jelly

Zest and juice of two Dooja Limes
¾ cup water
½ cup sugar
1 gelatine packet (10 grams)

Place water, sugar, lime juice and zest into a saucepan and bring to the boil. Turn off heat and allow to cool slightly, then add gelatine and stir. Strain jelly through a tea strainer and pour jelly on top of rice in glasses. Use a teaspoon to place strained zest on top of jelly as decoration. Top with a piece of candied ginger and an Aussie Violet flower (*Viola banksii*).

