

BORDER CROSSINGS

ORIGINS

BOTANY BAY LEARNING RESOURCES

Quandong (Wild Peach)



Santalum acuminatum fruit, West Wylong, New South Wales, Australia
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d3/Santalum_acuminatum_fruit.JPG

What do Indigenous people call this plant?

The Wiradjuri people of New South Wales used the name “guwandhang”, from which the name quandong was adapted. Other indigenous names include; “wolgol” (used by the Noongar, South Western Australia) “gutchu” (used by the Wotjobaluk, Western Victoria); “wanjanu” or “mangata” (used by the Pitjantjatjara, Uluru, Northern Territories), and “goorti” (used by the Narungga).

When was this plant first documented?

It is likely that Quandong fruits were shipped to Britain in the 1800s after the colonies were established. They were probably shipped as dried fruit or in the form of chutney and jam as these trees were unlikely to grow in the colder and wetter British climate.

How many varieties of this plant are known?

There are three types of Quandong, but only one of them is edible. The other varieties are the Bitter Quandong (which, as the name suggests, is very bitter) and the Blue Quandong (which is both bitter and sour).

Where and how was the plant originally grown and used?

The Quandong, like the Eucalyptus, has adapted to survive wildfires and cool burning. It can regrow from its roots. As it often grows in areas affected by wildfires or land managed by cool burning, mature plants are rarely seen.

The wood is occasionally used to make furniture but is not as popular as other trees from the same family.

How do Indigenous people relate to this plant?

Quandong and emus feature in much of the mythology of indigenous peoples in Australia. The Emus eat the Quandong fruit in order to survive in the semi-desert conditions where the Quandong trees grow. The emus then disperse the Quandong seeds when they get caught in their feathers or feet and are left in their droppings. In this way, the emu and the Quandong are interrelated and codependent, working together to keep universal balance and order. To many Indigenous people in Australia, this Emu and Quandong mythology explains moral and universal behaviour laws, their consequences and their inter-relationships in which all things are balanced.

Emus eat Quandong fruit but do not digest the seeds. Indigenous Australian people collect the seeds from emu droppings for replanting, or to use.

When and how did this plant first come to Britain?

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Special properties

The Pitjantjara people consider the Quandong to be a good substitute for meat and eat it if they were unsuccessful in their hunts. Historically, the fruits were collected in bark baskets, the kernel removed and the flesh rolled into balls which would be broken up and shared communally.

The Quandong fruit can be consumed raw or dried and is often made into jams, chutneys and pies. The nut can be ground into a paste and used to treat sore gums, and mixed with saliva to treat sores and rashes on the skin. It is also boiled and used as a general painkiller. The seeds are rich in oil and often burned like candles.

Indigenous people dry the fruit as it can be stored for up to 8 years without losing its flavour.

Fun facts

Quandongs have a similar flavour to apricots and rhubarb.

The Quandong tree is hemiparasitic - its leaves are able to photosynthesise, but it also attaches itself to the roots of other trees and gains its nutrients from the roots of the host.

Quandongs have a higher vitamin C content than oranges. Quandong fruit can be dried or frozen for 8 years without losing any flavour.

Fossilised Quandongs have been discovered in coal seams in Southern Victoria. dating from around 40 million years ago, when Australia was still linked to the Antarctic continent.

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BOTANY BAY is a participation and learning project by Border Crossings' ORIGINS Festival, made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to engage five schools across the country with the Indigenous heritage of plants, gardens and food.



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