

focus on

QUANDONG

Santalum acuminatum



RURAL
INDUSTRIES

Research & Development
Corporation

Part of an R&D program managed by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation



Overview

The quandong is a small native shrub or tree that grows 2-6 metres high. It produces a visually appealing yellow-to-red, tart tasting, dry-textured fruit with slender pale green leaves.

Quandong is also known as desert peach, native peach or wild peach.

Quandong has a wide natural distribution throughout southern Australia from arid desert areas to coastal regions.

It was an important native food source for Indigenous Australians across semi-arid and arid regions in the mainland states, with surplus fruit collected and dried for later consumption. Amongst the male members of Central Australia's Pitjantjatjara people, quandongs were considered a suitable substitute for meat.

Quandong was a welcome food source for early white settlers and the name quandong was one of 400 aboriginal words adopted into English from the Wiradjuri languages of south-western New South Wales in 1836.

The quandong has outstanding anti-oxidant capacity, high levels of folate and vitamin E, and is a good source of magnesium, zinc and iron.

Quandong

The mature quandong prefers bright sunlight and low relative humidity. It will grow in a range of soil types, but prefers a higher pH and some selections can grow in highly saline conditions. Soils should be well-drained as quandongs will not tolerate waterlogged soils as they are susceptible to root disease.

The plants grow wild in Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria and are found in smaller numbers in Queensland. In the Northern Territory, quandong populations have been in decline due mainly to the impact of feral camels, and the plant has been listed as vulnerable.

The species is hemi-parasitic, attaching to the roots of a variety of different host plants in the wild, including acacias, allocasuarina, bluebush and saltbush, to extract water and nutrients.

Quandong production has decreased significantly from its peak in 2001, when total harvest was estimated at 25 tonnes. A third of this came from commercial plantings, with the remainder from wild harvest.

Drought and feral animals have had an impact on wild populations, while orchards have suffered difficulties with drought, pests, diseases, cessation of a dedicated industry association (Australian Quandong Industry Association) and low survival rates during the establishment phase. Current production is estimated at around seven tonnes per year, 90 per cent of which is from cultivation.

Commercial plantings have occurred widely across most of South Australia, some with participation from Indigenous communities, as well as in New South Wales, Victoria, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

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Quandong seedling orchards produce fruit with significant variation in colour, yield, size, taste and strength. While manufacturing grades are oversupplied, growers believe more efficient information networks would ensure larger volumes of quality fruit to supply premium markets which are currently undersupplied.

Management of the host-plant relationship has been one of the challenges of cultivation. Prior to attachment to host plants, young quandongs are very prone to desiccation and require a regular watering regime, shading and wind protection. It is recommended that the host plant be established at least one year prior to planting or direct seeding of the quandong. Post-attachment, irrigation should be matched to the host plant's needs.

Harvesting

On farm, quandongs are harvested by hand and de-stoned and halved either manually or on cutting machines.

Many growers value-add by processing the fruit into a range of products for sale either online, or at food service and tourist outlets or via distributors. Other growers sell to native food processors who manufacture products under their own label and distribute them both in Australia and overseas.

Food uses

Although the fruit has a visually appealing red colour, marketing and consumption as a fresh fruit is limited due to the tart taste and dry texture. It is usually vacuum packed and frozen, or more commonly sun dried.

Quandong has a low moisture content relative to other fruits, so drying is a relatively simple process. Dried halved fruit can be stored indefinitely in an airtight container.

The taste is tart and tangy, and sweetness varies greatly between trees. The flesh of the quandong is suited to many culinary purposes such as jams, preserves, sauces, relishes, juices, desserts and ice cream toppings and liqueurs.

The oil rich kernel (nut) is also edible but there's very little market for it as yet.

Health benefits

Quandong has been identified as a rich source of phenolic-based antioxidants and also contains vitamin E, folate and zinc, magnesium, calcium and iron at levels higher than the blueberry, which is considered the benchmark.

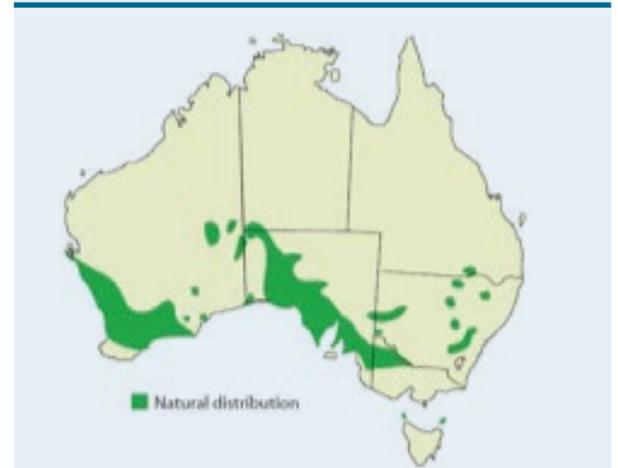
Other uses

Quandong is closely related to the arid zone sandalwood and, although the good-quality timber of the quandong tree is prized as a craft wood, it lacks the fragrant essential oils derived from the timber of many related species. The seed has also been used as a substitute in marble-based games such as Chinese checkers.



Quandong on tree

GROWING REGIONS



Source: The New Crops Industries Handbook - Native foods

FLAVOUR PROFILE

“ ...**Aroma of dry lentils**; some earthy and fermented notes...

Taste is slightly **sour and salty**... fruit is usually dry textured, **tart tasting** and sweetness can vary greatly between trees



Raw quandong



For more information

This fact sheet is one of a series summarising Native Foods R&D from 2007 to 2012. In a partnership between government and industry, the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and Australian Native Food Industry Limited (ANFIL) are working towards an innovative, profitable and sustainable Native Foods industry.



Australian Native Food Industry Limited (ANFIL) was formed in 2006 and is the peak national body which represents all interests in the rapidly growing Australian native food industry. ANFIL has taken the lead in working with industry, governments and other organisations to determine and prioritise research and market development strategies to progress the industry.

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RURAL INDUSTRIES
Research & Development Corporation

The Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation (RIRDC) is a statutory authority established to work with industry to invest in research and development for a more profitable, sustainable and dynamic rural sector.

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ISBN: 978-1-74254-737-4
Pub. No. 14/120