

Citrus australasica

The **Australian finger lime** plant (*Citrus australasica*) is a thorny understory shrub or small tree of lowland subtropical rainforest and dry rainforest in the coastal border region of Queensland and New South Wales, Australia. It has edible fruits which are under development as a potential new commercial crop.^{[2][3]}

According to the Swingle system it is not part of the genus citrus, but in a related genus *Microcitrus*.^[1]

1 Description

The plant is 2–7 meters in height. Leaves are small, 1–6 cm long and 3–25 mm wide, glabrous, with a notched tip and crenate towards the apex. Flowers are white with petals 6–9 mm long. The fruit is cylindrical, 4–8 cm long, sometimes slightly curved, coming in different colors, including pink and green.^[2]

2 Cultivation and uses

2.1 History

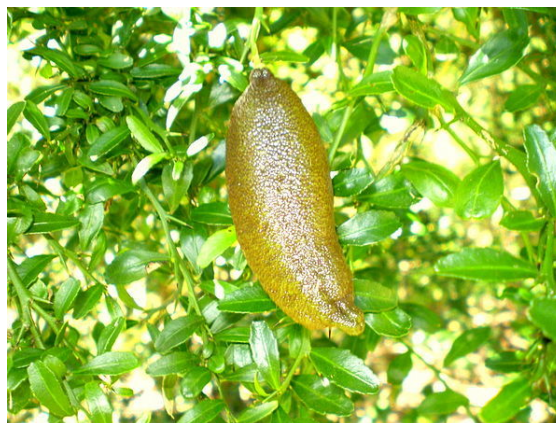
Early settlers consumed the fruit^[4] and retained the trees when clearing for agriculture. Colonial botanists suggested that they should be cultivated.^[4]

2.2 Rising demand

The finger lime has been recently popularized as a gourmet bushfood. The globular juice vesicles have been likened to a “lime caviar”,^[5] which can be used as a garnish or added to various recipes. The fresh vesicles have the effect of a burst of effervescent tangy flavour as they are chewed. The fruit juice is acidic and similar to that of a lime. Marmalade and pickles are also made from finger lime. The finger lime peel can be dried and used as a flavouring spice.^[2]

Commercial use of finger lime fruit started in the mid-1990s in boutique marmalades made from wild harvested fruit. By 2000 the finger lime was being sold in restaurants, including the export of fresh fruit.^[2]

The finger lime has been recently grown on a commercial basis in Australia in response to high demand for the fruit. There is an increasing range of genetic selections which are budded onto citrus rootstock. With the sudden



Brown skin type finger lime

high market demand for the fruit the primary source of genetic material for propagation has been selections from wild stock.

2.3 Diseases

In cultivation, the finger lime plant is grown in much the same way as other citrus species. It may be subject to some pests and diseases requiring pest control in cropping situations. This includes scale, caterpillars, gallwasp, and limb dieback. Research into fruit fly by Dr Andrew Jessop has concluded that finger limes are a non-host plant to fruit flies and as such are not a quarantine risk to importing countries.



Red finger lime.

Research conducted in the 1970s indicated that a wild selection of *C. australasica* was highly resistant to *Phytophthora citrophthora* root disease, which has resulted in a cross-breeding program with finger lime to develop disease-resistant citrus rootstock.^[4]

The CSIRO has also developed several *Citrus* hybrids by crossing the finger lime with standard *Citrus* species. These hybrids have created many cultivars which generate finger limes in many different colors ranging from light pink to deep blue-green. Finger lime is thought to have the widest range of color variation within any *Citrus* species.

3 References

- [1] The Plant List
- [2] Citrus pages, Native Australian Citrus, *Citrus australasica*
- [3] Mueller, Ferdinand Jacob Heinrich von. 1858. Fragmenta Phytographiæ Australiæ 1: 26. *Citrus australasica*
- [4] Low, Tim, *Wild Food Plants of Australia*, ISBN 0207143838
- [5] Finger lime: the caviar of citrus

4 External links

- Media related to *Citrus australasica* at Wikimedia Commons
- "*Citrus australasica*". *Australian Plant Name Index (APNI), IBIS database*. Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research, Australian Government. Retrieved 9 January 2014.

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