

Warrigal Spinach (*Tetragonia tetragonioides*)

Presented by Paul Henry

(Avicultural Society Meeting - August 2012)

The plant of the month for this month is Warrigal Spinach. It is an Australian native spinach also commonly known as Warrigal Greens.

It is a ground cover which grows mainly along the river banks in the area of Sydney where I live. It appears to grow well in this environment which indicates to me that it may prefer shade and moist soil conditions. My Neophemas love it.

You can eat it yourself; it is one of our native plants that they label as "bush tucker". When I first fed it to the birds I thought they would eat the leaves, but the Scarlet-breasted Parrots go for the stem. If you look at the base of the leaf stem there's little bulb-like node there, that's the seed parcel. The actual plant of course is like all spinaches in that it is very low in protein, I think it is only about 2-3%. I am not sure of its full nutritional value but it does have some calcium, some phosphorus and is very high in vitamin C. With my Neophemas I have got to watch that they don't eat too much as they will eat it in preference to the seed I give them. I can give half a stem to a breeding pair in the morning and they will finish it off by mid to late morning. The Bourke's Parrots will do the same. The finches go for the leaves and what I have noticed with the Scarlets is they will break up the stem and then the finches come along and pull out the centre part of it.

I have found nothing whatsoever detrimental with the plant in relation to feeding it to my birds and it is a plant that can be grown very easily.

(Paul brought a number of seedlings to the meeting to share with members.)

Comment (from Graeme Phipps):

It is a bush tucker plant - we've got it growing in the vegetable garden but it's got a bitter taste so you have got to actually blanch it in hot water and then it is okay to eat. It goes well with fish.

There are a number of websites with information concerning Warrigal Greens available on the internet. They vary considerably in the information they provide in relation to such things as to whether they should be grown in the sun or the shade, soils, etc., and whether they were or were not a source of food for indigenous people prior to European settlement, and as far as we could determine there is at the time of writing, little information on the actual nutrients of this plant. The consensus appears to be that it doesn't mind saline soils, is very high in vitamin C and a nutritious plant which is palatable for human consumption provided it is blanched before eating it or using it in recipes. A few references are provided below for further reading.

Wikipedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetragonia_tetragonioides

"The species, rarely used by [Maori](#) or other indigenous people as a leaf vegetable, was first mentioned by [Captain Cook](#). It was immediately picked, cooked, and pickled to help fight [scurvy](#), and taken with the crew of the [Endeavour](#). It spread when the explorer and botanist [Joseph Banks](#) took seeds back to [Kew Gardens](#) during the latter half of the 18th century. For two centuries *T. tetragonioides* was the only cultivated vegetable that originated from Australia and New Zealand."



SCPA South East Producers - The Kitchen Gardener - <http://scpa.org.au/21549.html>

Propagation: Some references say from herbaceous stem cuttings and from softwood cuttings: that plant does not grow true to form from seed. Another reference says the thick, irregularly-shaped seeds should be planted just after the last spring frost. Before planting, the seeds should be soaked for 12 hours in cold water, or 3 hours in warm water. Seeds should be planted 5-10 mm deep, and spaced 15-30 cm apart. The seedlings will emerge in 10-20 days, and it will continue to produce greens through the summer. Many references say both are valid.

Growth Habit: New Zealand spinach, also known as sea-spinach, is a non-native succulent annual with prostrate trailing stems 1m to 2m long. Can become a 'weed'.

Pruning: None

Soil: The plants grow naturally in sandy coastal soils and in the inland. Prefers good soil. Will grow in salty conditions.

Aspect: Full to partial sun.

Diseases: None

Insects: Snails and slugs do NOT eat this.

Recipes

[I Love Warrigal Greens](#)

[Warrigal and Sea Parsley Pesto](#)

[Warrigal Green Pasta with Soft Boiled Eggs and Basil](#)

[Warrigal Greens and Feta Pie](#)

Australian Bush Foods: Information Sheet 10 - ([read more...](#))

Some caution should be taken with Warrigal spinach as the leaves contain oxalic acid, which can be harmful to some people if consumed in large quantities. To remove the oxalic acid, blanch the leaves in boiling water for 3 minutes or so, then rinse them in cold water before using them in your cooking. Commercial use: Available from some supermarkets and markets as a fresh green vegetable. The seeds are widely available for propagation from seed dealers and nurseries.

North Narrabeen Headland - The University of Sydney - ([read more...](#))

Warrigal Greens are one of the better known native food plants. It contains an anti-oxidant. The majority of the plant's leaves may be eaten either raw or cooked. Both Warrigal Greens and stinging needles should be blanched or boiled before used. This exposure to boiling water will reduce the oxalate contained in Warrigal Greens and take the sting out of stinging needles. Aboriginal people, early explorers and settlers are all recorded to have made use of this plentiful and easily located plant. Today, the Warrigal Spinach is finding new favour among the increasing number of bush tucker restaurants. This is an ideal plant food for those seeking an introduction to the flavours of the Narrabeen Headland.

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