



travel feature

SAMPLE THE FRUIT FLAVOURS OF THE WORLD IN OUR OWN BACKYARD

If you're looking for exotic fruit flavours of the world, you don't need to go much further than our own backyard.

The rich volcanic soils and virtually drought-proof climate of the Tweed Valley provide the ideal conditions to grow just about anything – and the Tweed Valley farmers are game to give just about anything a go.

Tucked in behind the rustic Banana Cabana roadside stall in the tiny Tweed village of Chillingham, Buck Buchanan has transformed his former banana plantation into the United Nations of Citrus.

In his showcase 'Bush Tucker Garden', you can sample yuzu or Japanese lime (which actually originates from China and looks more like a small knobbly grapefruit); bergamot, which is mainly grown in the Italian province of Calabria; kaffir limes, a native of Indonesia; and the very alien-looking Buddha's Hands fruit which hails from the foothills of the Himalayas.

With its long tentacled fingers either closed in prayer or open to the sun, the Buddha's Hand is one of the oldest members of the citrus family. It is often hung in Chinese and Japanese households as a natural air freshener or used in perfumes with a citrus base.

Buck's harvest, however, is sent from the Tweed Valley to the kitchens of Australia's finest Asian restaurants where the fragrant rind is grated into salads or finely sliced to flavour fish.

The rind can also be used to make a zesty marmalade (see accompanying recipe) or mixed with ice-cream to add a bit of zing.

Buck's focus on these exotic citrus varieties was actually inspired by the humble – and little known – native fingerlime. Originating from our own Tweed Valley, this short, stubby deep green fruit splits open to reveal a froth of lime-flavoured bubbles that look for all the world like pale green caviar.

The tart flavour is the perfect companion to seafood and Buck ships crate-loads each week down to the award-winning chefs at Tetsuya Wakuda's legendary Japanese restaurant in Kent Street, Sydney.

A little closer to the coast, another long-time Tweed grower has also brought the world to our doorstep by planting the largest range of rare and tropical fruit on the planet.

Bob Brinsmead bought a former research station on Duranbah Ridge back in 1972. The Department of Agriculture ran experimental plots here for 30 years, trialling 'new' varieties such as avocados, lychees, mangoes and macadamias. It was, in fact, the first place in NSW to grow avocados.

Bob expanded on their pioneering work, bringing in rare and exotic species from all over the world and building the orchard collections up to the stage where they now number over 500.

Opened to the public as a family fun park in 1983, Tropical Fruit World also operates a roadside fruit market where you can buy massive jakfruits from India, black sapote (or chocolate pudding fruit) from Central America, longans and lychees from China and babaco (aka the champagne fruit) from Ecuador.

You can see all of these fruits and much, much more on a tractor tour through the orchards. The plantation is set out according to countries of origin – the South Pacific Gardens, the Indian Gardens, the Amazon Gardens and so on – and the tractor stops regularly so you can pick fruit and sample the different flavours straight from the tree.

Above all, the Tropical Fruit World experience is a brilliant way to get your children into eating all different kinds of fruit.

Buck Buchanan's Banana Cabana and Bush Tucker Garden is located on the Murwillumbah-Nerang Road at Chillingham and if you ask nicely – or better still, phone ahead – Buck will take you on a free guided tour. Phone 02-6679 1022 or go to www.tweedfruit.com.

Tropical Fruit World is on Duranbah Road at Duranbah, approximately 10 minutes drive inland from Kingscliff. They are open from 10am to 4.30pm seven days a week; park admission, including the tractor tour, is \$33 for adults, \$16 for children or \$72 for a family pass but you there is no charge to access the fruit market. Phone 02-66 777 222 or go to www.tropicalfruitworld.com.au.

BUDDHA'S HAND MARMALADE

Ingredients

Peel of 1 Buddha's Hand, thinly sliced
4 cups water
3 cups white sugar
Juice of ½ lemon
3 tbslp Amaretto liqueur

Method

Place the Buddha's Hand peel into a large pan and cover with water. Leave it sit for about 1 hour.

Place pan over high heat and boil for about 30 minutes. Reduce heat to medium; add the sugar and stir until completely dissolved. Stir in the Amaretto and boil very gently for a further 45-60 minutes. Add lemon juice about 10 minutes before the end of the cooking time.

Pour the mixture into a jar which should be at room temperature. The marmalade will thicken and become more syrupy as it cools off.

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