focus on

ANISE MYRTLE

Syzygium anisatum

RURAL INDUSTRIES
Research & Development Corporation

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

Anise myrtle fresh leaves (Photo Sybilla Hess-Buschmann)
Source: www.anfil.org.au/flavour-of-the-month/flavour-of-the-month-february/

Overview

Anise myrtle produces leaves with a strong aniseed scent and flavour. In the wild, the trees are found in the sub-tropical rainforests of northern New South Wales.

In the past it's been known as aniseed myrtle, but this was changed to avoid perceived confusion with aniseed (Apiaceae). Scientifically, it was also previously classified Backhousia anisata after James Backhouse, the 19th century English nurseryman and Quaker missionary.

As the trees are so rare, there is little known about traditional uses of anise myrtle, although it has been reported that the trees were harvested during World War 2, when aniseed flavouring was in short supply. The leaves are believed to have been made into a tonic with a vitalising effect.

Anise myrtle leaves can be used fresh, but are generally dried and ground, or distilled into an essential oil.

Anise myrtle has outstanding antioxidant activity, is rich in magnesium and is also a good source of lutein, folate, vitamin E and vitamin C.

It has the ability to mask unpleasant odours from other foods, has been shown to have anti-fungal and anti-microbial properties and is also used in the cosmetic industry.

Growing Anise Myrtle

In the wild, anise myrtle grows naturally in the sub-tropical rainforests along streams and on lower slopes in the Nambucca and Bellinger valleys in northern New South Wales. There are two main varieties, but only one is regarded as suitable for commercial production.

The trees will occasionally grow naturally as tall as 45 metres, but in commercial plantations they're generally limited to the size of a large shrub or small tree. Young leaves are soft and pink, and become green and glossy with wavy margins once mature.

In the past, most of the product that reached the main markets - processors and restaurants - was harvested from the wild. However, market demand for consistent year-round supplies combined with concerns over the environmental impact of accessing rainforest systems have seen cultivated plantings fully replace wild harvest.

Commercially, anise myrtle is grown across northern New South Wales and south east Queensland. It's generally a sideline for lemon myrtle growers rather than a primary enterprise. Anise myrtle has also been an attractive ornamental tree in landscapes and home gardens for many years.

In 2010, total annual production was between six and 10 tonnes of dried leaf and 0.7-1 tonne of oil. Existing plantings have the capacity to produce much larger volumes, but many small growers report that they are not harvesting due to lack of a market for their produce.

Growing conditions

Anise myrtle prefers a nutrient rich soil in a well-drained, sunny position. Younger trees require irrigation, but once established are relatively hardy and recover quickly from dry spells.

Regular pruning is required within the first years to provide a 'shrubby' shape and increase leaf production.

Harvest can occur all year round, and the trees can be cut two times in any one year. Commercial operations have purpose-built mechanical harvesters and computerised drying systems. Smaller growers will hand harvest and may send their crop to a contract processor for drying and milling.

Food uses

The market for anise myrtle is considerably less developed than lemon myrtle, although health benefits of the two have been shown to be similar, which may present a positive opportunity for anise myrtle to increase its demand in coming years.

The leaves are generally milled, and impart a distinctively sweet anise liquorice flavour in both sweet and savoury products. Uses include teas, drinks, syrups, glazes, cakes, biscuits, dressings, sauces and ice creams.

Anise myrtle is sometimes sold as an 'anisata spice', which can replace aniseed or star anise.

The leaves can also be distilled into essential oil which is used as a food flavouring. Due to the similarity to star anise, this includes lending itself as an ingredient for alcoholic products with an aniseed flavour.

Storage

Anise myrtle leaves are cool dried to prevent the loss of the essential oils, and then ground and stored in cool, dry conditions for later use. If done properly, the dried leaves can maintain the essential oils and flavours for years.

Health benefits

Studies have found that anise myrtle has outstanding antioxidant activity, as well as containing lutein, folate, vitamin E and vitamin C.

Anise myrtle has also been found to have exceptional quantities of the compound anethole, which gives the leaf its aniseed flavour and aroma.

Trans-anethole rich herbs have traditional uses in treating conditions such as anorexia and reflux and to help settle intestinal cramps, colic and flatulence.

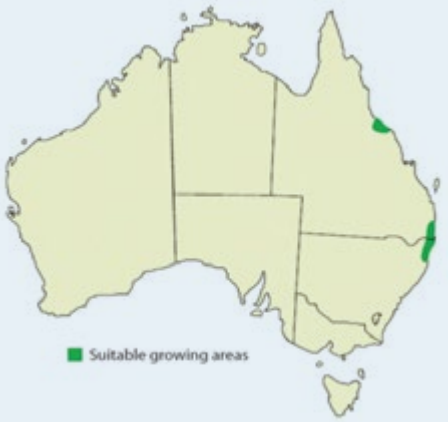
Other uses

Essential oil can be used for a number of different purposes including cosmetics and aromatherapy.

The anise myrtles' distinct smell can also be used to eradicate unpleasant odours in washing, as a cleaning product where bad smells are common such as bathrooms, or to mask odours from other foods.

Anise myrtle essential oil is also known to attract fish to lures.

GROWING REGIONS



Source: Crop Industries Handbook

FLAVOUR PROFILE

"...Aroma of ***aniseed, menthol and herbs"***

flavours include aniseed, ***liquorice...***

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

(per 100 grams leaf, dried, ground)		*(per 100 grams dry weight)*	
Energy	629 Kj	Zinc (Zn)	1.440 mg
H20	-	Magnesium (Mg)	247.4 mg
Protein	8.1 g	Calcium (ca)	261.45 mg
Total fat	0.0	Iron (Fe)	5.86 mg
Total saturated fatty acids	0.0	Selenium (Se)	0.0
Carbohydrates	3.6 g	Phosphorus (P)	100.6 mg
Sugar (total)	3.6 g	Sodium (Na)	51.75 mg
Fibre	-	Potassium (K)	773.3 mg
		Manganese (Mn)	9.595 mg
		Copper (Cu)	0.367 mg
		Molybdenum (Mo)	2.6 µg
		K : Na	14.9

Anise myrtle
Source: www.essentiallyaustralia.com.au/about-us/research

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.

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Australian Native Food Industry Limited

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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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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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