

“Paying attention is a form of reciprocity
with the living world, receiving the gifts
with open eyes and open heart.”

– Robin Wall Kimmerer



www.castlemaineseedlibrary.org.au

Cover image - Frances Cincotta

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that is correct and relevant at the time of publication.



Microceris walteri
Yam Daisy / Murnong Daisy

Acknowledgments

The Indigenous Seed Project acknowledges the local Dja Dja Wurrung people as the first inhabitants of the land we live upon. We recognise their continuing connection to this land, rivers and creeks and to their rich ancient culture. We acknowledge that at the time of European arrival the totality of the lands that are now known as Victoria were occupied by sovereign Indigenous nations who owned, cared for and enjoyed their land in accordance with their laws, customs and traditions.

We acknowledge, with full respect, the strength and power of all Traditional Owners, Elder, Ancestors, and young leaders who fight to protect and look after Country, Community, Language and Lore in the face of ongoing colonial interruptions and cultural genocide.

To Learn more please visit djadjawurrung.com.au

The Indigenous Seed Project supports a Treaty for Victoria.

I would like to thank Frances Cincotta for her all-round local plant wisdom - having access to lived knowledge is such a privilege. Thank you also for your excellent proofreading skills and constant support for the project.

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Jo Matthews, Indigenous Seed Project coordinator

Terminology

Indigenous

Refers to a plant species that occurs naturally in a region but not exclusively. For example, River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) is indigenous to our shire but it is also indigenous to many other parts of Australia.

Endemic

Refers to a plant species that grows only in a specific designated area. In Mount Alexander Shire we only have one plant species that is endemic - the Southern Shepherd's Purse (*Ballantinia antipoda*), a highly threatened species that occurs only on Mt. Alexander. It is also correct to say that Southern Shepherd's Purse is indigenous to Victoria, or indigenous to Australia, or indigenous to Shire of Mount Alexander.

River Red Gum, which occurs naturally in every state and territory of Australia except for Tasmania, is endemic to Australia, meaning it does not occur naturally in any other country.

Provenance

Refers to the area that the seed was originally collected from. Across Mount Alexander Shire conditions for plants vary from place to place with changes in soil type, altitude, aspect, annual rainfall, frost severity, etc. so where the seed is sourced from influences how well the plants grown from that seed will thrive when they are planted out. For example the summit of Mt Alexander is 430m higher than Castlemaine, receives 2 inches more rain annually, and is granitic in geology whereas Castlemaine is sedimentary so plants grown from seed collected on the mountain would not do so well in Castlemaine and vice versa.

Hello and thank-you for taking some Indigenous seeds to germinate!

The Indigenous Seed Project emerged from the desire to raise awareness of the local flora in Mt Alexander Shire. The project will create the opportunity for anyone to experience propagating indigenous seeds and to also learn about the ecological and cultural significance of the plant they are growing. The accompanying booklets will also provide valuable information about how to use the plant in a garden context and information on growing conditions for each plant. With only 15% of the local Box Iron Bark forests remaining, it's more important than ever that we get to know these plants and include them in our gardens. This will help extend habitats for the local fauna and make your garden more resilient to future climate changes by using plants that have adapted to local conditions.

I hope you will sit with this little book, read its content and create a connection to the plant/s you have chosen to grow. Perhaps next time you are in the bush you will be able to recognise, name and appreciate these plants deepening your connection to the local environment.

Jo Matthews, Indigenous Seed Project coordinator

Murnong/Yam Daisy

Microceris walteri

Family : Asteraceae

Description:

The bright-yellow daisy heads of Murnong are held on slender stalks, curved like a 'swan neck' when budding, straightening when in full bloom (to 40cm). The dark green, notched leaves form a delicate rosette (5-30 cm wide) at the base of the flower stalks. Seeds are held in a globe of papery stars. Like many local perennial herbs, Murnongs die back each year to tuberous roots after flowering, with leaves reappearing in early winter and flowering from August to December.

Growing Conditions:

Murnong grow well in full sun to semi shade. They are moderately tolerant of frost (to -5°C), drought and a range of soil types, including heavy clays. They don't cope well with waterlogging.

Cultivation and Maintenance

Murnong can survive in skeletal, compacted soils but thrive best in rich, free-draining soils with supplementary water during dry times. While Murnong show robust growth in their first year in the garden, they tend to disappear in subsequent years. While the cause of disappearance is a mystery, it is likely due to herbivory, perhaps by slugs on the leaves or even nematodes on the roots. When protected in a pot, Murnong flowers reappear year-after-year.



The 'swan-like' Murnong bud is a distinguishing feature, helping to differentiate between similar nonindigenous daisies. Photo -

Jo Matthews



A native bee species resting on Murnong flower. Photo – Jo Matthews

Garden value:

Murnong provide a bright scattering of yellow to a cottage, woodland or grassland garden when planted among other low growing perennial flowers and grasses. When grown in a pot, Murnong is a happy reminder of seasonal change, with its rush of growth in later winter, spring flowering and summer seedheads. They also provide a valuable connection to the history of Dja Dja Wurrung in our region, as the Murnong tubers were an important part of their traditional diet.

Ecology:

Once an abundant plant through the understory of open forests, woodlands and grasslands of South-eastern Australia, the Murnong was decimated by goldmining, sheep trampling and grazing. It is now generally found as scattered individuals in box ironbark forests and rare grassy woodland remnants in our region. The Murnong is important for a wide range of pollinating insects, including native bees, hoverflies, native wasps, butterflies and beetles. On cold mornings, small insects can be seen 'sun-baking' on the yellow flower disks, warming up before they can set off foraging. Native bees also shelter amongst the petals on a windy day.

Seed collection and propagation:

Collect seed into a paper bag in late October to early January. The seeds will be ready when the flower head 'puffs-up', gently falling away when touched. Sow in March by evenly distributing seed over a tray of quality native potting mix. Flatten the potting mix in tray with a heavy flat object (bricks are good) so germinating surface is even. Do not cover seed as it requires light to germinate. Water in seed and place in a semi-shaded spot. Seedlings can be planted out in May but benefit from growing on in tube for upto a year, this will give the tuberous root time to develop and be more robust to transplant.

Cultural Values:

Pre-invasion the roots of Murnong were a staple food, crucial for the survival of many indigenous people in South-eastern Australia. It was observed by early colonisers as covering entire grasslands and hillsides. Women dug up the radish-like swollen tubers with digging sticks and then roasted them in baskets in earth ovens. This digging action turned over the soil and thinned out the clumps, encouraging future plant production. It was believed the roots should not be collected before the plants flowered. This was probably because during the drier winter period, before springtime flowering, the roots would not be fully developed. The introduction of sheep, cattle and rabbits to the landscape led to the Murnong becoming relatively scarce. Sheep in particular were known to pull the whole plant out as they grazed.

According to local elder, Aunty Julie Mchale; "The cultivation of Murnong also assisted the growing of other edible tubers-daisies, orchids and lilies. No patch was ever completely denuded and there was deliberate planting of the tuber-bearing species. When the tubers were dug up the smaller tubers were broken off and replanted (like we do when separating bulbs etc.). These tubers were valued for trade."

Murnong is being revived as a root vegetable and is appearing on menus as chefs embrace its cultural heritage and flavour. (See article - 'This native superfood is 8 times as nutritious as potato and tastes as sweet as coconut'. SBS online -4 Jul 2022)

Websites cited:

www.recreatingthecountry.com.au

www.tuckerbush.com.au

Knowledge gleaned from: Boorp Boorp Boondyn Exhibition
- Castlemaine Visitor Information Centre

*Note: Traditions vary between indigenous communities, not all of these descriptions are specific to the Dja Dja Wurrung people.



**Murnong flower-head after
seeds have detached. Photo -
Frances Cincotta**