PLANT FACT SHEET

Pandanus conoideus Lamarck

GENUS *Pandanus* **FAMILY** Pandanaceae

COMMON NAMES Marita, red fruit pandan

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Spice

The ripe fruit is cooked then the juice mixed with water to make a sauce.

DESCRIPTION

A short much branched screwpine with many prop roots. The prop roots have prickles. Trees may have up to 8 or 10 main branches. Trees grow up to about 5 metres tall. There are many short sharp spikes on the trunk and branches. The leaves are between 1 and 2 metres long and about 10 cm wide. The leaves grow opposite each other but are twisted to look like a spiral. There are thorns along the edges of the leaf. It produces a large (1 m long) dark red to yellow fruit with a hard rough/spiky surface. The fruit is hard and has small lumps or spikes over the surface. The fruit grows at the ends of the branches between the leaves and it has 3 straight leaf like bracts along the edges.There are many cultivated varieties.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It grows throughout PNG from sea level up to 1650 m altitude. It becomes common above 500 m. It can be up to 2,500 m above sea level. It occurs in Papua Province in Indonesia and in Maluku. In Townsville Botanical Gardens.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Marita pandanus are normally planted from suckers or cuttings. The cuttings are using ends of branches. Suckers produce more quickly. A new shoot normally sprouts out of the branch just below where the end was cut off. The cutting will soon develop roots and become established when it is planted. A more popular method is to use a sucker or shoot growing from the plant down near the ground. The sucker is separated from the parent plant then replanted in its new place. These suckers grow more quickly and can bear fruit after 18 months to 2 years. A cutting off a branch may take up to 4 or 5 years before it produces a fruit.
Marita is often planted along the roads and walking tracks. It is also planted in most gardens and serves as a reminder that the land is owned by the person who planted the marita. So plants are dispersed instead of being grown in a plantation. A marita fruit is harvested when the colour starts to change to a brighter red or yellow. Sometimes it also starts to crack slightly at this stage. The fruit is cut from the branch.

The ripe fruit is cooked then the juice mixed with water to make a sauce. To do this, a ripe marita fruit is normally split into 3 sections along its length. Then the central yellow stalk and pith area are dug out. The outside hard red layer is then cooked. Preferably it is cooked using hot stones although sometimes it is boiled in a saucepan. After cooking for about half an hour the hard pits are squeezed from the soft red juice by squeezing through the hands. Water is added to make an oily red soup. The soup is then eaten. Sometimes it is eaten by dipping green leaves or sago into the soup. At other times it is eaten with a spoon made from the marita leaf. Some people just suck the cooked juice from the seeds. As well, some people use the oily juice to cook food in. The pits or seeds are thrown away, normally to pigs. A harvested marita fruit will only keep for about one week. After cooking it will only last for about 12 hours.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Marita is a seasonal crop but the fruiting season is not a short clearly marked one. The main season goes from about October to March but individual trees can bear almost throughout the year. Near the sea the marita season is longer and more spread out but as the places increase in altitude above sea level the season becomes more distinct. The marita season is an important occasion. During the season people often use marita twice a day.

NOTES

There are about 600 Pandanus species. They grow in the tropics.

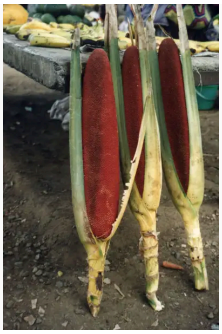
PICTURES



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