

Ornate Fruited Neisosperma

A plant of significance to this region is the Ornate Fruited Neisosperma, *Neisosperma kilneri*. The distinctive, large ornate 'seeds' of this rainforest tree attract considerable interest during the summer months.

Neisosperma belongs to the family *Apocynaceae* - the same family as that of the commonly cultivated Frangipani (*Plumeria* sp). Only two of the eighteen species occur in Australia, *N. kilneri* and *N. poweri*. They are evergreen trees with milky sap. The shiny, dark green leaves usually occur in whorls.

N. kilneri is described as a "tree to 20m high". The white, perfumed flowers are very similar to Frangipani though somewhat smaller. The inedible fruits are produced in pairs and reach the size and shape of a small hen egg. The thin, outer covering changes from dark green to yellow, orange, red then black. Beneath this is the distinctive, ornate, brown woody structure (the endocarp) which contains 1 to 4 flat seeds. It would appear that the seeds are a food source for one of the native rats, as on a number of occasions, caches of old fruits, all with their ends chewed out, have been seen under rock 'shelters' or in hollow logs.



Neisosperma fruit and flowers



Mt Blackwood

N. kilneri is classified as an endangered species. It has only been recorded from rainforests in the North Kennedy (NK) and South Kennedy (SK) Pastoral Districts. (Mackay is within South Kennedy, the coastal section of which extends from the O'Connell River south of Proserpine to Marion Creek south of Koumala). The type specimen, ie the specimen from which the species was described, was collected from Mt. Dryander, north of Proserpine in the North Kennedy District in April 1871. It is locally common in the Mt Dryander and Gregory areas.

Prior to 1991, the only record of South Kennedy specimens was a 1927 collection from "Range W of Koumala". (In spite of a number of botanical surveys undertaken in the Koumala Ranges, it wasn't till 1996 that further specimens were collected from this location).

In July 1991, while on an expedition to collect propagation material of the Mount Blackwood Holly (*Graptophyllum ilicifolium*) for the Living Collections of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, there was great excitement when the first distinctive 'seeds' of *N. kilneri* were discovered amongst rocks in a creek in the Mount Blackwood area. This led to the discovery of flowering trees growing with *Graptophyllum ilicifolium* on the steep rocky slopes. Knowing the significance of this 'find' specimens were collected for both the Queensland and National Herbaria, photos were taken, and later propagation material of this and the Mt Blackwood Holly were sent to Canberra.

N. kilneri has been cultivated at Wickham Park in Brisbane since 1989 and in Ipswich since 1980. A Branch Member from Proserpine has been growing plants since the late 80's. Specimens are also being trailed in Cairns, Bundaberg, Gympie and in the Tweed Valley.

Text by Irene Champion (1997) 'Neisosperma Narrative' SGAP Mackay Branch

Some *N. kilneri*, planted at the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens were already flowering and fruiting just 12 months later.

Continued over:

Clusters of fruit - January



In your garden, this tree enjoys constant moisture in a full sun to semi-shaded position. A large tree to 20+ metres, Ornate Fruited Neisosperma is best suited to large yards. The fruit is not edible - the milky sap in the fruit skin, leaves and flowers is poisonous.

The flowers are highly scented with a jasmine-like fragrance and the scent wafts through the garden in summertime - especially at night.

The endocarp is highly ornamental underneath the skin and appears hand carved - a beautiful tabletop display.

References:

Society for Growing Australia Plants Mackay Branch "The Neisosperma Narrative".

FORSTER, P.I. (1993) A taxonomic revision of Neisosperma Raf. (Apocynaceae) in Australia. Austrobaileya Vol 4 No 1.

Queensland Vascular Plants names and distribution. Queensland Herbarium 1993.



Ornate Fruited Neisosperma
4 years old - 7 metres high

Where can I view this tree?



The ornate endocarp



Flowers

For more information, please contact the
Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens on
Ph: (07) 4952 7300 Fx: (07) 4952 7333 or email: botanic@mackay.qld.gov.au
www.mackayregionalbotanicgardens.com.au