

Bunya Bunya Pine

Distinctive appearance

Dark green, branches sweep down, dome shaped profile.

Pre – historic survivor

Have outlasted dinosaurs, Dates back to the Jurassic era 180 million years ago. When Gondwana separated into different land masses 45 million years ago, the bunya pine continued to grow in small defined areas of Australia. The bunya pine is closely related to the monkey puzzle tree *Araucaria araucana*, a native of South America. The Bunya –bunya is now a mountain refuge in today's warmer and drier climate – in the rainforests of SE Queensland.

Indigenous associations

Large seasonal ceremonial gatherings Bunya nut was a traditional food of the Australian aboriginal people especially in part of the Great Dividing Range now known as the Bunya Mountains national park. As the harvest time (between January to March) approached people travelled hundreds of kilometres to congregate at specific sites. Hostilities were suspended. There they joined in ceremonies, settled disputes, held fights, arranged marriages and traded goods until the season drew to a close and they returned to their home territories.

Bunya Pine ownership Groves of the trees were often under particular Tribal/family ownership. Ownership passed from father to son. Only the owner was permitted to climb his own trees

Food

The nut resembles a chestnut and is equally tasty. Now farmed commercially for the Australian bush food market.

Timber

Timber sought for cabinet making and it is valued for use as sound boards for acoustic guitars.(e.g Maton)

Classification and nomenclature

One of a number of Araucariaceae, named for the Araucarias, a native tribe in Chile where the first Araucaria (Monkey Puzzle Tree) was discovered. Named in 1843 by Hooker in honour of Bidwill who bought the specimen of the plant to London to be studied

Botany

During the bunya season from January to March the trees produce vast numbers of cones bearing edible nuts, with bumper crops occurring on a roughly three year cycle. The branches grow sideways and get longer over the years, then eventually fall off when they get too long and develop the characteristic domed crown. The female cones, up to 300mm long and weighing up to 10kg, contain the edible seeds.

19th century landscape gardening

Tree is a link to the garden's beginnings. Victorian era passion for conifers and novelty made this a popular species in many gardens

NOTES TERRY O'BRIEN 2011