

*Araucaria bidwillii*

[Synonyms : *Pinus petrieana*]

**BUNYA BUNYA** is an evergreen tree. Native to Australia (particularly Queensland) it has pineapple-like green cones.

It is also known as *Araucaria* (French), *Araucária da Queenslândia* (Portuguese), *Araukaria* (Swedish), *Araukarie* (Danish, German), *Araukarie 'Affenschreck'* (German), *Bunya-Bunya-Baum* (German), Bunya bunya pinenut, Bunya pine, and *Pin d'Australie* (French).

The to 12 in. long and wide, pineapple-like cone (which can weigh as much as 10 lb.) shatters when ripe to distribute its edible woody-shelled red seeds.

*Bidwillii* commemorates an English botanist, plant collector and explorer, John Carne Bidwill (1815-1853) who explored New Zealand and Tahiti and settled in Australia. For a few months in 1847 he was both Director of the Sydney Botanic Garden and Government botanist but bureaucratic bungling in the Colonial Office is said to have led to the appointment of his successor in January 1848. From 1848 to 1853 he was Commissioner of Crown Lands at Wide Bay (north of Brisbane, Queensland) during which time he also began planting a botanic garden at Tinana which does not exist today. Most of his plants were transferred to Sydney when he died. The majority of the plants he collected in New Zealand were sent to England (especially the Botanic Garden at Kew) and among his correspondence were letters to Sir William Hooker (1785-1865) the first Director there. In 1841 his *Rambles in New Zealand* was published in London and they were reprinted in New Zealand in 1952.

The red seeds (which are almost potato-like (*Solanum tuberosum*) in composition and usage) not only provided an important part of Australian Aboriginal diet but also featured as a sought after delicacy. (Before consumption the nuts were often buried near a waterhole for a couple of months to germinate.) In addition they played a role in the ceremonial of some Aboriginal tribes. For instance near the eastern Australian coast around Brisbane individual groves of bunya bunya growing there were often owned by a particular tribe, and the tribes met every three years as the seeds ripened and feasted on the roasted nuts.

The yellowish-white wood has been used for timber on a commercial scale. It has been made into a wide range of objects from furniture and flooring to tool handles.

Bunya bunya is believed to have been introduced to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1848.

Like the monkey puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*), bunya bunya with its more open leaf arrangement has also been cultivated as an ornamental tree in parks and large gardens.