

Pleiogynium timoriense

[Synonyms : *Owenia cerasiferum*, *Pleiogynium cerasiferum*, *Pleiogynium pleiogyna*, *Pleiogynium popuanum*, *Pleiogynium solandri*, *Pleiogynium timorense*, *Pleiogynium timorensis*, *Spondias acida*, *Spondias pleiogyna*, *Spondias solandri*]

BURDEKIN PLUM is a deciduous tree. Native from central Asia to Australia it has leaflets that are bronze when young.

It is also known as Tulip plum.

The large pumpkin-shaped seed generally occupies 70-80% of each small rounded, red to dark purple fruit.

The fruit do not ripen fully on the tree. After they have been picked they need either to be buried in sand or stored in paper bags in the dark for several days to soften the -purplish to greenish-white flesh and improve the palatability to roughly that of, according to many authorities, an indifferent damson (*Prunus institia*).

Timoriense means ‘of or from Timor (an island at the eastern end of the Indonesian Lesser Sunda Islands)’.

Records suggest that in Australia the fruit were popular with Aborigine tribes (who probably showed newcomers how to ripen the fruit in the ground). But when in 1770 Sir Joseph Banks (1744-1820), the English botanist and his Swedish colleague on HMS *Endeavour*, Daniel Carlsson Solander (1736-1782) who became keeper of the the British Museum’s Natural History Department in London three years later, came across them records suggest that Sir Joseph’s view of them was mixed. On the one hand he is believed to have described them as –

so full of a large stone that eating them was but an unprofitable business.

and on the other his journal is said to note –

These when gathered off from the tree were very hard and disagreeable but after being kept a few days became soft and tasted much like indifferent Damsons.

However in due time explorers and settlers are said to have enjoyed them too.

The stored fruit are used locally to flavour meat or make jellies, jams and wine – and the seeds are also eaten.

In the wild the fruit are enjoyed by various animals. In Australia flying foxes and wallabies seem to have attracted particular attention for dispersing the seed.

For Tonga the tree is an important source of timber and the seeds are strung to make skirt-like clothing.

The tree is widely cultivated as an ornamental, certainly in Australia and India – and in Africa it also serves as a street tree. Australians have also planted it as part of revegetation programmes.

The hard and strong durable, yellowish-brown wood is said to be sought after for dance floors (especially in Australia) and has also been used for shipbuilding, decking, coachbuilding and railway sleepers.