

Solanum centrale – Bush Tomato

Commonly known as Bush Tomato, Kutjera or Desert Raisin is a plant of the drier parts of the subtropics and tropics of Australia occurring in arid, sandy desert areas Queensland, Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia with an annual rainfall of 150 - 300mm.

An evergreen shrub that grows to 30 cm, it has a thorny aspect, grey green leaves and forms suckers from the mother plant. With good rains it will grow rapidly from the rootstock and fruit prolifically. In years of poor rainfall it can go dormant and die back to the rootstock and may remain such for many years.

The fruit is 1 to 3cm in diameter and yellow when ripe, they dry on the bush and resemble raisins. The fruit is rich in vitamin C and has a strong, pungent taste of Tamarillo and caramel. Fruit can be eaten raw or cooked, small quantities can be eaten fresh or the dried, shrivelled fruits can be ground into a powder or preserved in oil. Fruiting in the wild occurs for two months in late Autumn, however, there are several Aboriginal communities that grow the plant commercially and it has been found that sufficient water will extend fruiting to 8 months.

Prefers a well-drained soil in a warm open sunny position, tolerates dry conditions once establish but produces extended fruiting if an adequate supply of water is provided. Drought resistant and moderately frost tolerant.

There are warnings associated with this fruit. Green fruit contains the toxin solanine and only fully ripened fruit should be eaten. There are several related species which look like *Solanum centrale* but the fruit remains toxic even after ripening.

Propagation

This plant requires smoke treatment for germination. Smoke treatment is the simple process of covering the sown seed with smoked vermiculite and watering in.

Plant just under the surface of a well drained seed raising mix in full sun. Keep moist until germination. *Solanum centrale* prefers a loam/gravel well drained soil. Fast growing and hardy, *Solanum centrale* likes a full sun position and is tolerant of extremely dry conditions once established. Sends up suckers over time; often the main plant will die back and the new shoots will pop up a short distance away.