



Some Interesting Vegetables I'm Growing

Wed, 03/09/2011 - 00:42 -- Vegetable Vagabond

Humans are funny creatures. While koalas are happy with only 3 types of eucalyptus leaves and refuse to eat anything else, ever, people like me are always looking out for some new tastes and new foods to grow.

But having ordinary vegetables growing in your garden does not mean you cannot branch out with new tastes and textures. Do you notice that bees love certain going-to-seed flowers? Well, there is a clue there about their sweet taste as those flowers are laden with nectar! Have you ever tried deliciously sweet fennel flowers? To eat them at their best, you need to get to them when the yellow flowers are fully open. Try one and see.... look at other fennel flowers and compare.... you will become very good at selecting the sweetest very quickly. And if your breath needs freshening or you simply enjoy the feel of clean teeth, just chew a fennel flower every time you pass by the plants. Don't remove fennel plants when they go to seed; let them flower and enjoy first the flowers and then cook with some of the seeds and save some seeds to sow later. Fennel will readily re-shoot and provide you with extra, small bulbs, as well as lots of fronds and flowers almost all year, even in a bit of snow!

I once grew daikon ? a Japanese radish with a long white root. Well, ?long? is putting it mildly! They grew so fast and so long that they pushed themselves a foot out of the ground before I pulled one up. The roots were at least 2 feet long by then! Sadly I did not like them so strong, so most went to seed. Then I discovered the mild flavour and crunchy texture of the green seed pods. Wow! They seem to produce seed pods over a long period so every salad I made was sprinkled with the crunchy, green seed pods. You can even throw them in a stir fry and they keep their crunch. Now, if I grow a any radish I don't like, I wait for the green seed pods and in that way I can still enjoy a milder version of the root. Of course you should let some go brown and dry, to save and sow next year.

During winter there is nothing in the garden I love to eat more than broad bean tips. Once the plants are at least 6 inches high you can nip off the growing tip and enjoy the taste and fresh, juicy flesh of these incredibly health-packed morsels. They do not mind the frost and a bit of snow so you will not be compromising their growth. In fact, I think they benefit from tip pruning so why not eat the tips? I also find that broad beans come up all over the garden at other times of the year and I keep picking those tips too.

Another flower with a surprising sweetness is that of the Asian greens family. Probably any would do, but I have lots of bok choy and mizuna that get away from me and start to flower. The flowers and stems are edible and lovely raw or tossed onto a stir fry at the end of cooking. I also enjoy the mustard greens flowers.... the list is endless!

The Aboriginal people of Australia lived here for at least 40,000 years before white settlement and slowly we are discovering the wonderful and surprising flavours of the native plants they lived on. This is often now called 'bush tucker'. Aboriginal communities are able to pick from the wild but there just simply are not enough plants to support non-Aboriginal people eating them too. Many native Australian plants are very difficult to cultivate and this has added to the slow introduction of them to everyday modern life. Some native fruits and spices grown in the tropics are readily available there, but still not in enough numbers to find their way into southern markets where I live.

So, I am on the lookout for local bush tucker and so far have a few plants in my garden which I would classify as such. *Edible Plants in Tasmania* by Bruce French is a fabulous book and a neighbour and I am constantly on the look out for cultivated versions of the plants he mentions. The most common and well known here is the Mountain Pepperberry (*Tasmannia lanceolata*) which, surprisingly, is very underused in the kitchens of my friends. The misconception is that you need the elusive berries to make use of the plant, but in South Australia where I have come from, we cosset and love this plant which is so foreign to our hot, dry climate, and are very content to use its spicy leaves. They have a rich, pepper taste.... like peppercorns mixed with lemon.

Other plants I have recently added to my collection, but not yet eaten from, are the native raspberry, native elderberry and native sea celery.

Image (optional):

Group content visibility:
Use group defaults

Source URL: <http://kgi.org/blogs/vegetable-vagabond/some-interesting-vegetables-im-growing>