

ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF BIODIVERSITY

WATTLE PANCAKES FOR LUNCH

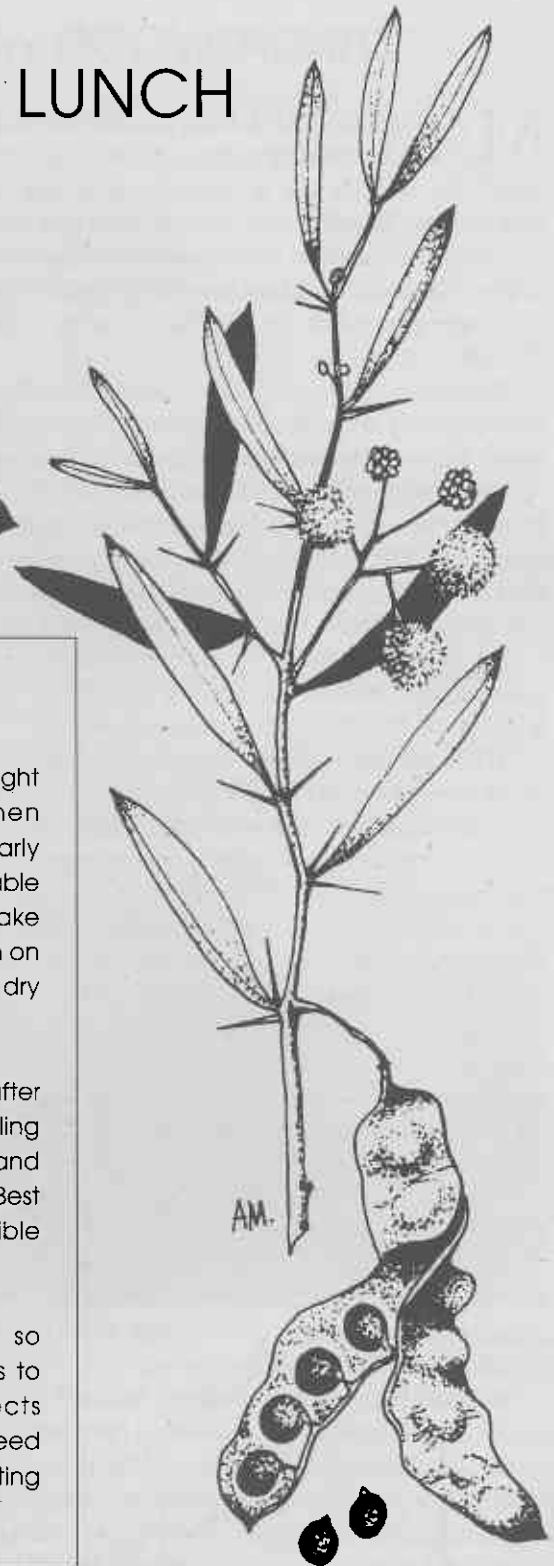
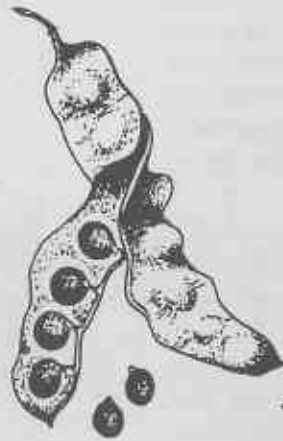
WHEN planning your reveg, why not incorporate some rows of wattles specifically to produce good seed crops? Not only can you use the seeds for future reveg, you may also be able to eat them yourself ...

Seeds from plants that have N-fixing capabilities - eg peas, beans, chickpeas, groundnuts, lentils - have long been known to contribute much-needed protein to human diet. Wattle seeds are similarly high in protein, and there is growing interest in the investigation of their potential as a human food.

Because early european settlers preferred the familiar food plants that they brought with them, there was little attempt to record which plants the Aboriginal people ate, so much knowledge was lost. However, what is known has been gathered into the book "Edible Wattle Seeds of Southern Australia" by Maslin et al (see New Books section in WW 2/4).

One of the best bets is *Acacia victoriae*, Bardi Bush. It is widespread in the arid and semi-arid areas of Australia, on loam and clay-loam, coming as far as the northeastern edge of the wheatbelt. It forms an open, somewhat prickly shrub which flowers in late spring, producing abundant seed crops in early summer. In the rangelands, sheep (and goats) readily browse the flowers and young foliage, which have a protein content of 12% and digestibility of 48%. The seeds were an important source of food for aborigines. The green pods were roasted lightly and the seeds eaten or the mature seeds were ground and mixed with water to make a paste. You could use this as a dip, rather like homus.

'Bush tucker' foods are gaining in popularity, and already have a



Acacia victoriae

Seed collection: Pods light brown in colour when mature, in spring or early summer - exact time variable according to weather. Rake from bush onto tarpaulin on ground. Store in a cool, dry place.

Propagation: Sow soon after first good rains. Pour boiling water over seeds, let stand for 2-3 hours. Drain. Best sown as soon as possible thereafter.

Fauna value: Prickly, so excellent shrub for birds to nest in. Many insects attracted to flowers. Seed crop valued by seed-eating birds.

small niche market in Australia. Planting some rows of potential bush tucker wattles will not only achieve your landcare, water use and fauna habitat objectives, along with some emergency forage, it could also give you a head start into a new industry as it develops. One

would expect that arid zone plants, planted along, say, creeklines in the dryer agricultural area, would do very well.

Why not give it a go?

Illustration from "What Seed is That?" by Neville Bonney. Greening Australia, South Australia; 1994.