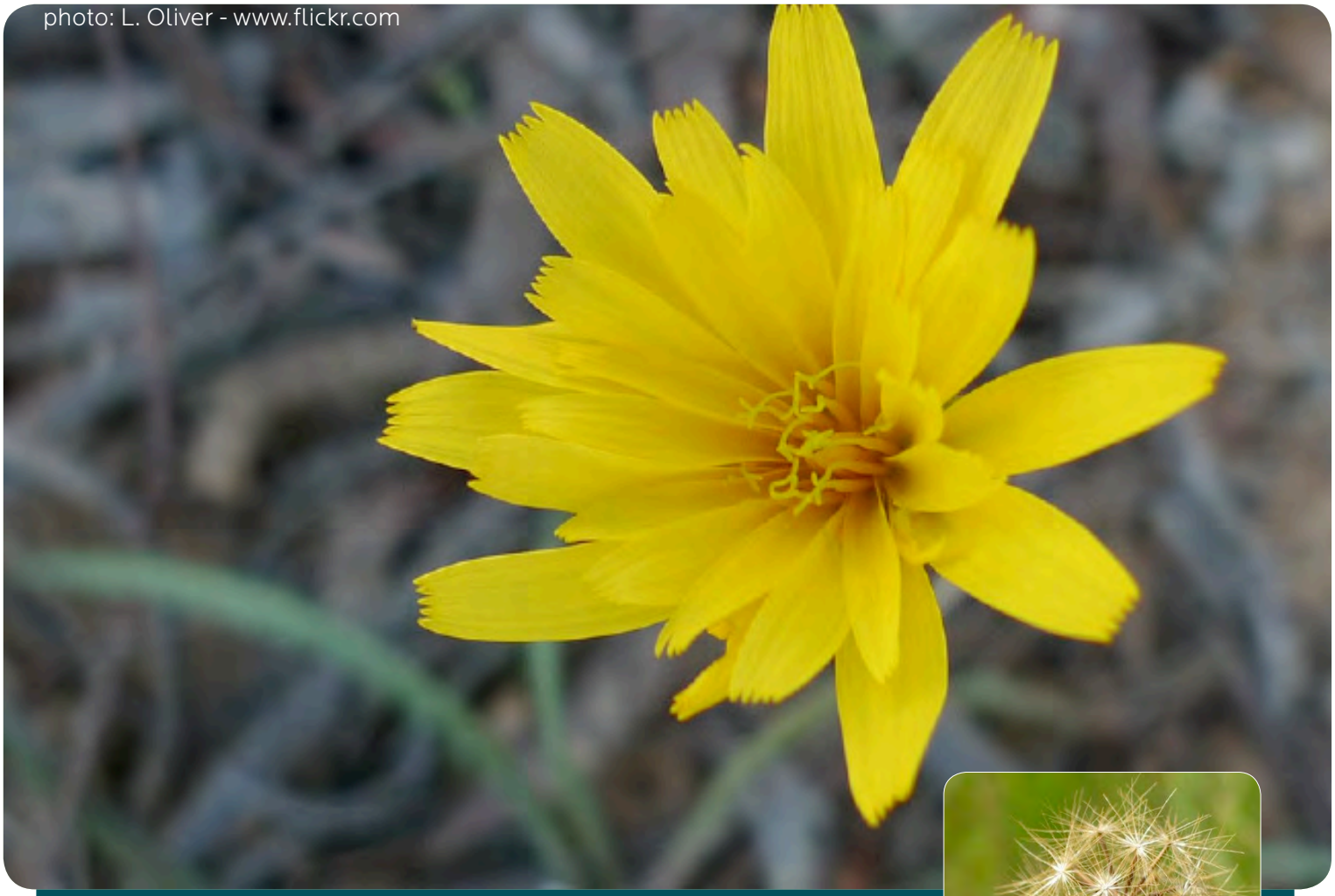
photo: L. Oliver - www.flickr.com

Microseris lanceolata

photo: C. Miller

Microseris lanceolata **is a perennial herb with a tufted rosette of entire or toothed lanceolate leaves [4] and fleshy tuberous roots [5].** ***M. lanceolata*** **has the synonym** ***M. scapigera*** **but this name is properly applied to a New Zealand species [6]. Common names include Murnong, Yam Daisy [4], Native Dandelion [6], Yam, Black Fellow's Yam [3].**

M. lanceolata **looks very much like a dandelion but may be distinguished from that introduced species by its narrow leaves, drooping flower buds and pale juicy tap root [6].**

Natural Populations

Microseris lanceolata is found in Qld, NSW, Vic, Tas, WA, and SA [5]. It is a variable species in form and structure, the Tasmanian form being markedly smaller than the mainland forms [4]. It is very widespread ranging from subalpine habitats through sclerophyll forests and grassy woodlands to grasslands, mallee and saltbush communities [3, 5, 9].

Once common and widespread in the grassy woodlands of western NSW, it is now very rare over most of its former range [10].

Population map:

www.ala.org.au/explore/species-maps/

Flowering and Seeds

M. lanceolata flowers from spring to autumn [5, 9]. After flowering the seedheads become fluffy and similar to a dandelion. The seed heads ripen to a cluster of fluffy, tan achenes, each having a crown of fine extensions called a pappus. Seed dispersal is by wind [4]. At any one time, only a small proportion of the seed will be ripe [1].

The flower stalk is notable for its interesting pollination and seed dispersal mechanism. It is pendulous when in bud, then becomes erect for flowering, lifting the flower to the attention of pollinators, then becomes pendulous again until the seed head

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ripens, at which time it becomes erect again, exposing the seed head to the best possible wind exposure [4]. No other daisies of the grassy woodlands do this [10].

M. lanceolata seeds are easily collected in late spring or early summer (November is usually best) when the seedheads are fluffy and white. The seeds should be stored dry and in the fridge until needed [8, 10]. *M. lanceolata* seed has very poor viability after about 6 months [8].

Cultivation and Uses

Propagation is from seed [6]. Seed has a 2-3 month after-ripening period but loses viability after 6 months. Sow in autumn to early winter. Seed sown in warmer months when the air temperature is above 20^{0}C may go into dormancy and either will not come up at all or take many months [8].

Surface sow or cover lightly. Germination usually occurs within 2-4 weeks, although seed viability may vary. Stratification at 4 ^{0}C for 2-3 weeks before sowing can improve results [2].

This quick growing plant is suitable for a rockery or cottage garden [6]. The plant grows well in full sun to part shade, all soil types and well-drained to dry conditions. It is drought and moderately frost tolerant [6].

The long narrow leaves emerge from underground tubers after autumn rains. As the soil dries out in summer, the plants wither back to their renewed underground tubers [10]. *M. lanceolata* is highly palatable to livestock, and does not survive long under continuous livestock grazing. This may be because there is a critical period after the old tuber has been used up and before the replacement tuber has formed - if the plant's leaves are eaten during this period the plant will be greatly weakened. Plants may have a better chance of surviving if grazing were restricted during spring and early summer [10].

The species has edible tuberous roots and was once an important source of food for the indigenous people of Australia including Tasmania. The introduction of cattle, sheep and goats by Europeans led to the near extinction of *M. lanceolata,* with calamitous results for the people who depended upon *M. lanceolata* for a large part of their food. *M. lanceolata* was prepared by roasting or pit baking; the taste is described as "Murno gladst", which translates: "sweet, with a flavour of coconut" [4]. Tubers can be eaten raw as well [9], they are said to be crisp and juicy [8], and are high in starch [9, 11]. Tubers are available spring, summer, autumn, less palatable in winter [9,11].

To source seeds or plants:
www.grassywoodlands.org.au

References

[1] Ralph, M. (1993). *Seed Collection of Australian Native Plants For Revegetation, Tree Planting and Direct Seeding.* 2nd ed. Fitzroy, Victoria: Bushland Horticulture.

[2] Ralph, M. (1997). *Growing Australian Native Plants from Seed For Revegetation, Tree Planting and Direct Seeding.* Fitzroy, Victoria: Murray Ralph/Bushland Horticulture.

[3] Cunningham, G.M., Mulham, W.E., Milthorpe, P.L. and Leigh, J.H. (1981). *Plants of Western New South Wales.* D. West: NSW Government Printing Office.

[11] Zola, N., and Gott, B. (1992). *Koorie Plants Koorie People: Traditional Aboriginal Food, Fibre and Healing Plants of Victoria.* Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne.

Internet links

[4] Wikipedia: **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microseris_lanceolata**

[5] PlantNET National Herbarium of New South Wales: **http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/NSWfl.pl?page=nswfl&lvl=sp&name=Microseris~lanceolata**

[6] Australian Plants Society, South Australia Region: **http://www.australianplantssa.asn.au/photo/m-lanc.html**

[7] Australian Bush Life website: **http://www.australianbushlife.com.au/roast-murnong-microseris-lanceolata/**

[8] **http://www.bushfood.net/viewtopic.php?t=635**

[9] Australian National Botanic Gardens and Australian National Herbarium website: **http://www.anbg.gov.au/apu/plants/micrlanc.html**

[10] Prober, S. and Thiele, K. Grassy Box Woodlands Conservation Management Network: **http://users.tpg.com.au/tmcleish/plants/plants_yamdaisy.html**

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