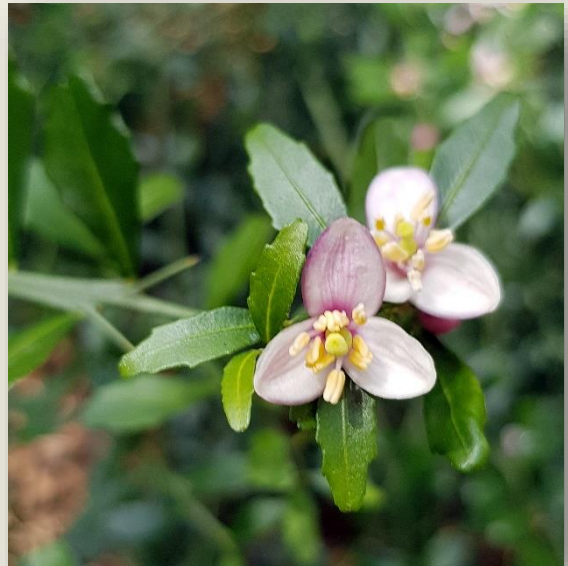


Citrus australasica **Australian Finger Lime, Caviar Lime**

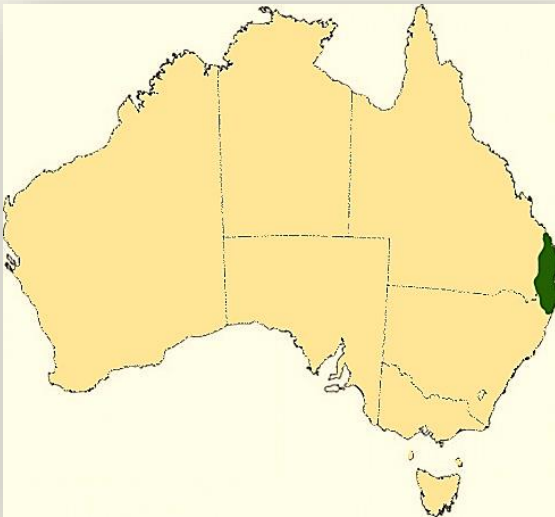


Australia has relatively few food plants that have been shown to be economically viable; the Australian Finger Lime, or Caviar Lime, *Citrus australasica*, is one exception. The extraordinary fruits of this spiny shrub/small tree from the rainforests of the Border Ranges that encircle north-eastern New South Wales and south-eastern Queensland, are now much sought after by restaurants and are often advertised as a *gourmet bush food*. The fruits contain myriads of tiny, spherical juice-filled vesicles with a delightful tangy flavour that burst in the mouth. They are often referred to as *lime caviar*.



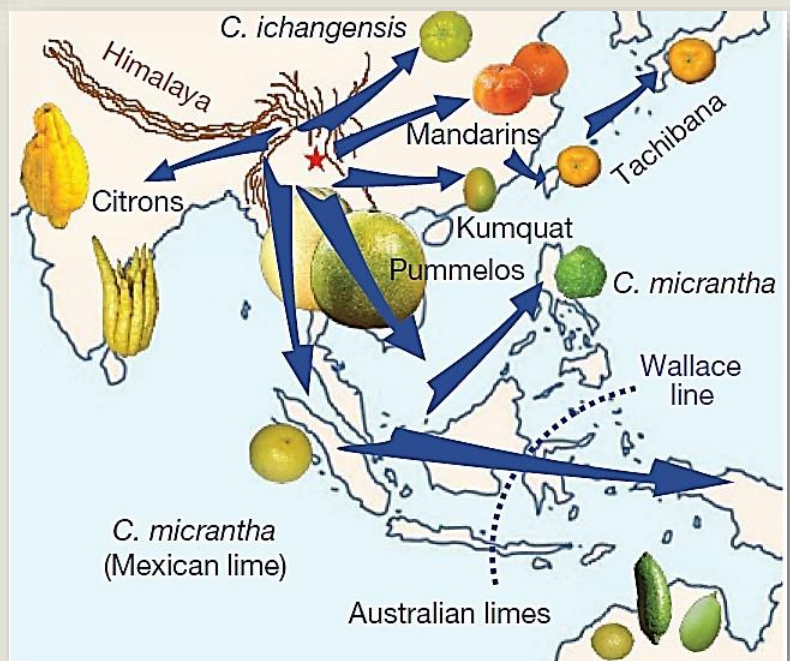
We were quite surprised to find that, in addition to the Finger Lime, *Citrus australasica*, Australia has five other native species of *Citrus*. For a very long time, the Finger Lime was known as *Microcitrus australasica*, but a revision by David Mabberley in 1998, resolved the name as *Citrus australasica*.





We are more familiar with other members of the *Citrus* family, oranges, lemons, limes, mandarins than we are with the Australian native limes but in recent years, molecular biologists have been able to plot the origins and evolution of *Citrus* species and hybrids.

The centre of diversification, is believed to be in the south-eastern foothills of the Himalayas in what is now Assam (India), Yunnan (China) and Myanmar. Diversification was associated with climate change, in particular, significant weakening of monsoons in the Late Miocene.

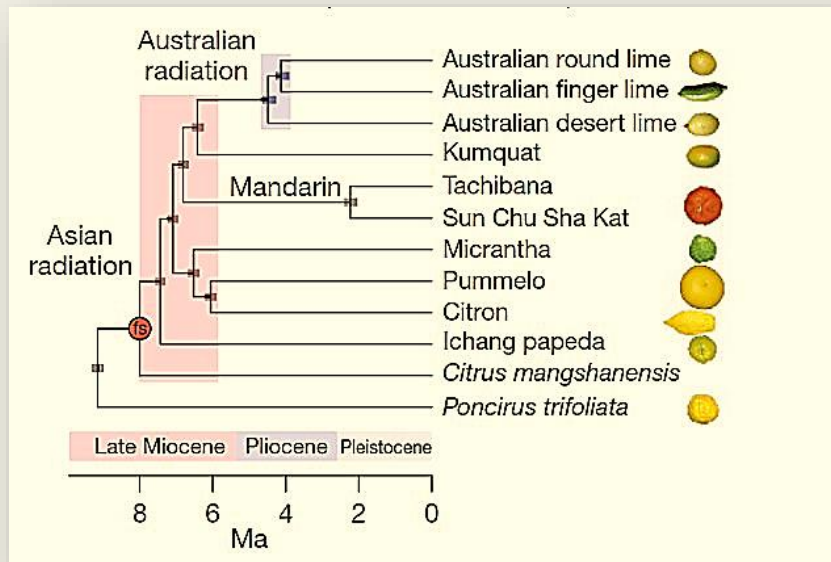


Wu et al. 2018 Proposed dispersal routes of ancestral *Citrus* species from the centre of origin in NE India, northern Myanmar and NW Yunnan. *Nature* **554** (7692): 311–316.



This led to rapid radiation throughout southeast Asia. A second radiation event was associated with migration across the Wallace Line in the Early Pliocene, and this gave rise to the Australian limes.

Look for finger lime shrubs in the Biology Courtyard annex.



Wu et al. 2018 Chronogram of *Citrus* species. Two distinct phases of species radiation: south-east Asian followed by Australian *Citrus* diversification. *Nature* **554** (7692): 311–316.

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Fuller D Q et al. Charred pummelo peel, historical linguistics and other tree crops: Approaches to framing the historical context of early *Citrus* cultivation in East, South and Southeast Asia In: AGRUMED: Archaeology and history of citrus fruit in the Mediterranean: Acclimatization, diversifications, uses [online]. Naples: Publications du Centre Jean Bérard, 2017 (generated 08 mai 2019). Available on the Internet: <<http://books.openedition.org/pcjb/2173>>.

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Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citrus_australasica

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