

Issue No 9, January 1998.

NOTICE: Hard copies of the Australian New Crops Newsletter are available from the publisher, Dr Rob Fletcher. Details of availability are included in the [Advice on Publications Available](#).

19.1 *Sauropus androgynus* (sweet leaf bush)

[Also known as *chekurmensis*, *chekup manis*, *changkok manis* or *katuk*]

Sauropus androgynus has been a popular leafy green perennial vegetable in Malaysia (especially Borneo) for many years. It was introduced into India in the 1950s and has attracted some notoriety recently in Taiwan.

There may be an opportunity for *Sauropus* in far Eastern markets; Martin Price (of ECHO, North Fort Myers, Florida, USA) reports that Malaysia exports *Sauropus* to Japan as "tropical asparagus" (<http://www.xc.org/echo/tnkatum.htm>).

The leaves and the top 15cm of stem tips of the *Sauropus* plant have a pleasant taste, similar to fresh garden peas, and slightly nutty and are normally eaten raw in salads or steamed, to add to stir-fry, rice and egg dishes, soups or casseroles. The leaves retain their dark green colour and firm texture on cooking and are served in restaurants as "sayor manis". The flowers and small purplish fruits of the plant have also be eaten.

Sauropus has a high level of provita-min A carotenoids, especially in freshly picked leaves, as well as high levels of vitamins B and C, protein and minerals. Nutrient content of the leaves is usually higher in more mature leaves.

The crop grows rapidly in hot humid conditions but becomes relatively dormant in cooler environments. Farmers in Malaysia force the growth of stem tips by fertilisation, irrigation and the use of shade cloth.

Plants are usually propagated vegetatively, since the plant grows readily from cuttings. Seed longevity is poor, seeds remain viable for only a few months.

The species is highly mycorrhizal-dependent, is adapted to acid soils and will grow in heavy clay soils. The only report of pests or disease is some damage overseas from the Chinese rose beetle (*Adoretus sinicus*; <http://agrss.sherman.hawaii.edu/onfarm/veg/veg0000b.html>).

In its natural state as an under-storey plant in lowland rainforest, *Sauropus* grows to 6m; when grown as a vegetable crop it requires regular pruning to 1-2m tall for best results.

Sauropus became a popular ingredient of an unconfirmed weight control method in Taiwan in 1995 and several cases of poisoning were reported. The most common form of consumption with the weight control method was as an extract, with fruit juice. Rapidly progressive obstructive lung disease resulted, persisting up to forty days after the method ceased. Those consuming high levels of *Sauropus* appeared to be worst affected, especially those consuming the plant as the uncooked extract.

The poisoning was believed to have been associated with the alkaloid papaverine but this compound had not previously been associated with this level of toxicity. *Sauropus* extract has been found to have a very strong activity against *Bursaphelenchus xylophilus* (pine wood nematodes).

[Grateful acknowledgment is made of the contributions of Isabell Shipard, Shipard's Nursery, Nambour and Joe Friend, Pacific Neem, The Channon, to these notes. Responsibility for any inaccuracies lies, however, with the editor].

Any claims made by authors in the Australian New Crops Newsletter are presented by the Editors in good faith. Readers would be wise to critically examine the circumstances associated with any claims to determine the applicability of such claims to their specific set of circumstances. This material can be reproduced, with the provision that the source and the author (or editors, if applicable) are acknowledged and the use is for information or educational purposes. Contact with the original author is probably wise since the material may require updating or amendment if used in other publications. Material sourced from the Australian New Crops Newsletter cannot be used out of context or for commercial purposes not related to its original purpose in the newsletter

Contact: Dr Rob Fletcher, School of Land and Food, The University of Queensland
Gatton College, 4345; Telephone: 07 5460 1311 or 07 5460 1301; Facsimile: 07 5460
1112; International facsimile: 61 7 5460 1112; Email: r.fletcher@mailbox.uq.edu.au

[\[New Crops Home Page\]](#) [\[New Crops Program\]](#) [\[Australian New Crops Newsletter\]](#)
[\[New Crops Publications\]](#) [\[Order Form\]](#) [\[People\]](#) [\[Crop Profiles\]](#) [\[Other Resources\]](#)

originally created by: [GK](#); latest update 6 June 1999 by: [RF](#)