



Resilient Plants

Yam daisies appear again on Hay plains

Yam daisy or Murnong (the traditional name in some areas) was an important food plant of the local Aboriginal people as the plant produces annually edible, fleshy tuber roots. Digging sticks were used to remove a portion of these tubers. Historic stock movements combined with rabbit plagues and significant dry periods contributed to its rapid decline in western NSW. It is very palatable to stock and is readily grazed and easily trampled.

The yam daisy is a perennial forb. It has a flower stalk with a relatively large head of yellow florets similar to a dandelion. The head droops before becoming erect to attract pollinators such as hover flies. The seed heads ripen to a cluster of fluffy pappus-clad fruits that are dispersed by the wind. Growth from seed or established tuber/s starts in autumn or winter when the characteristic leaves appear. After flowering, the forb dies back quickly to ground level in late spring. The yam daisy population on the Hay plains grows amongst the bladder saltbush communities with many plants growing up through the bladder saltbush (*Atriplex vesicaria*). The La Nina events of 2021 and 2022 triggered the growth of isolated populations of yam daisies on the travelling stock reserve between Booligal and Hay. This resulted in the forb being observed, discussed, photographed, seed collected, and seed and a specimen sent to the Royal Botanic Gardens in Victoria to be formally identified.

Work to date on the Hay plains yam daisy has determined that this species has longer-than-typical tubers and an unusually high number of “plumes” (these help with wind dispersal of the seed). Further work may yet show this yam daisy to warrant naming beyond *Microseris walteri* (pers.com N Walsh).



Above left to right:
Yam daisy flower, yam daisy seed, yam daisy tuber

La Nina events caused yam daisies to grow in isolated populations on the Hay plains.



Local Land Services

2022 Timeline

- 1 September 11**
Linda Stewart discovers yam daisies on the Travelling Stock Reserve between Booligal and Hay.
- 2 September 12**
Sally Ware from Riverina Local Land Services assessed site and collected samples.
- 3 September 13**
Bureau of Meteorology declares a third consecutive La Nina, with 664 mm of rainfall received in Hay compared to the median of 333 mm.
- 4 September 16**
Plant and seed samples are mailed to the Plant Identification Service at the National Herbarium of Victoria for identification.
- 5 September 26**
Professional photos and drone footage are taken by photographer Brett Naseby.
- 6 September 27**
Botanist Neville Walsh receives yam daisy seeds to be grown in the Botanic nursery and by himself.
- 7 September 29**
Seed is collected by Murray Local Land Services for their seed bank, and pastoral ecologist Martin Driver assesses the yam daisy population.
- 8 October 11**
Riverina Local Land Services releases a PR on the yam daisy discovery and shares social media posts.
- 9 October 12**
Sally Ware gives an interview on the yam daisy with ABC Riverina, leading Hay landholders to report their sightings of the plant.

Photos:
Top left: Hover flies on yam daisy flowers
Top right: Yam daisies growing through bladder saltbush

References:
Walsh, N (2016) A Name for Murnong (*Microseris*: Asteraceae; Cichorioideae). *Muelleria* 34: 63-67

