

Occasionally in my not-so-busy social life—which includes riding motorbikes, running a vanity-centred weight loss program for myself and corresponding with all sorts of people across this wattle-infested land—I like to take time out to appreciate the smaller things of life. Needlepoint, kittens, jam-making and nuts, for example. Macadamia nuts are my current fascination. These are also called bush-nuts by the type of person who likes to imagine he or she is a hunter-gatherer while strolling down the aisles of Woolies.

When I spoke with Stephanie Alexander (ALR 135) she bemoaned white Australia's lack of appreciation of this delightful nut. The crafty Americans grow—or, since a recent cyclone, grew—these nuts en masse in Hawaii. Well, following the lead of Australia's original inhabitants by a mere 40,000 or so years, it seems that at least one Australian company has discovered the piquant beauty of the macadamia. The company I wish to focus on here is Macadamia Plantations of Australia, which has developed the AussieMate range of products. The AussieMate range encompasses roasted salted macadamias, honey roasted macadamias, chocolate covered macadamias, raw macadamias, crushed macadamias and macadamia oil.

It was this last-listed product, nestling among the imported olive lubricants, that first caught my eye. A little koala wearing a shirt with the slogan "I'm a Native" decorated a bottle of macadamia oil. Like most warm fluffy women, I love soft toys, so my paw moved the macadamia oil into my trolley.

From trolley to register to kitchen. I split an avocado, that welcome Native American fruit. I drizzled, and discovered total bliss. Macadamia

oil is full yet delicate, massaging the tongue without cloying, penetrating the palate with ecstasy. And the bliss is quite indigenous. I was so enthusiastic about the product that I wrote to the company to share my joy. And they wrote back, enclosing more macadamias—in nut form this time. My kitchen was soon replete, absolutely abundant with the smells of fecundity. I was as loaded with nuts as a horse's head is full of eels in that German film, and I used the recipes sent by the company to make macadamia pesto, and a macadamia fruit cake.

I read the company's brochures about the history of the nut which informed me that "these nuts, although well-known to the local Aboriginals, were first discovered by Europeans in Australia's east coast rainforests in the 1820s. They were named after the notable Australian Dr John Macadam..." I was pawing an eponymous, native, colonised nut, and it tasted simply wonderful, and even richer as I understood aspects of its history.

The company exports nuts to all corners of the world, packaged in all sorts of boxes, bearing the images of women, the Opera House, Uluru and, of course, the fluffy marsupial that made me enter Nut Paradise in the first place. Some of the nuts wear chocolate coats as they venture around the world. These value-added nuts reach out everywhere (where consumers exist) and say hello, taste me, I'm yours, I'm attractive, I'll teach you about Down Under. And like a marsupial, I'm unique. Even when coated in Native American chocolate, I still taste distinctly Australian.

My husband receives an American Express-promoted advertisement for a brand of American Christmas cake using pecans, and we defiantly

say "We won't eat pecans like a toucan parrot. We're for the macadamia here. It's more than a koala could bear." Freedom of choice is a wonderful thing, as is the ability to make such credit card-led decisions, and bad jokes.

Companies that select unusual products like the macadamia and run with them are doing more than helping the Australian economy and themselves. They are protecting diversity and the cultural/culinary heritage of us all. This is the lovely side of the market, and I defy any of the readers of this column to say that a world without the macadamia nut could be as rich as one with it. This is one rainforest gene which won't be lost, because it is nice to eat. Chocolate-covered macadamia nuts should be tasted by everyone at least once, and I have adopted them as a symbol of hope. An open mind and an open mouth can be things of beauty. So are certain aspects of the market, something that is occasionally forgotten in a cruel and hungry world.

By the way, mix macadamia oil, vinegar, garlic and parsley (or basil). Shake. Dress your salad like a lady in a floral skirt. And taste the good side of capitalism. I know I have. I do now as I listen to Frank Sinatra sing "Ol' Man River" on CD. ■

Penelope Cottier.

(Thanks to Judy Grainger, National Sales Manager of Macadamia Plantations of Australia, for doing her job with enthusiasm, and giving me nuts and information to play with.)



**MOVEABLE
FEAST**

MUCH ADO ABOUT NUTTIN'

**"If 'ifs' and 'buts'
Were fruit and nuts,
We'd have Christmas
every day"
P J O'Rourke,
Parliament of
Whores.**