

PORTRAIT OF A SPECIES

Bowenia serrulata

Bowenia serrulata is a strange but beautiful member of the family Zamiaceae. This cycad grows in profusion in the relatively small area just north of the Tropic of Capricorn near the coast in central Queensland. The same area is also the home of one of the forms of Macrozamia miquellii.

Bowenia grows mainly within the confines of the Byfield State Forest, hence the common name "Byfield Fern". Much of the area has been cleared and replanted with Pinus radiata which does not appear to have affected the natural growth of Bowenia in any way as they appear to grown equally well in the Pine forest as in the natural Eucalypt forest. The soil in the area consist of well drained decomposed granite which is very rich in humus.

The underground rhizome of large Bowenias attains the size and appearance of a twenty pound pumpkin. This fleshy stem is able to send one or more protrusions around its circumference towards the surface of the ground. Each protrusion may have one, two or three leaves as diagramed

On some plants I have seen in habitat, the leaves are quite large, having a petiole of 4'6" high and leaves of 4' long and 3' wide. The female cone sits directly on the surface of the ground and is usually hidden by leaf litter. It's color is green with a slimy appearance and seems as if it would be wet to touch. The flesh of ripe seeds is a bright lavender.

by Stan Walkley

