

# ROSELLA

## Bali's Magic Flower

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The first time I saw a glass of iced rosella tea I was reminded of rich, red garnets. The contents of the glass glowed a vibrant scarlet and had a tart, refreshing flavour that reminded me of cranberries. Such a beautiful drink, I thought, just had to be good for you.

Rosella (Roselle, Hibiscus sabdariffa, Red Sorrell, Karkade, Kazerum and many other vernacular names) is the waxy flower of a bush probably originating in Africa. Thanks to an NGO project, Bali is becoming a significant producer of chemical-free Rosella tea.

Scientific research and traditional wisdom both confirm that a daily glass of Rosella tea brims with health benefits. Rosella contains a flavanoid, essential amino acids, calcium, riboflavin, iron, magnesium, the anti-oxidant beta-carotene and Omega-3. The flower is rich in vitamins A, B1, B2, and D and contains 9 times as much vitamin C as an orange. It relieves the symptoms of gout, and new studies in Taiwan have shown that it may be beneficial for the management of high cholesterol and blood pressure. Many cultures use it as a medicinal herb.

"Futures for Children Foundation", a Swiss-based NGO established to provide water and sustainable livelihoods for the poor villagers of Muntigunung, started the Rosella cultivation project on the dry mountain slopes in 2009. Rosella literally grows like a weed even in poor soils and re-seeds itself easily, requiring little or no care.

The villagers have embraced this new crop with enthusiasm. Now the whole mountainside glows scarlet at harvest time -- a colour that brings prosperity to hundreds of people who previously relied on begging for income.

In the second year of the project, 60 tons of flowers were harvested. The farmers were paid for the flowers and other villagers were employed to wash them, cut out the heart, solar-dry and pack the flowers at the production centre. Last year's Rosella crop employed a total of 84 people working in two shifts for 20 hours a day -- the flowers must be processed quickly -- during the three months of harvest. About 270 farmers in 27 villages sell Rosella to the project.

Before the start of this project, these villagers made about Rp.100.000,- month by sending their women to Ubud to beg in the streets. Through the Rosella crop, they have substantially increased their income and families now earn up to Rp. 900,000 a month from Rosella and other projects. These families no longer have to beg. Health has improved, children are attending school and vendors now come to the villages with products for sale.

The original goal of the Futures for Children Foundation was to provide water for the 5500 people who live in 35 villages in Munti Gunung, Bali's driest area.



Raising funds in Switzerland and through the Rotary Club, it built huge rainwater catchment tanks in 11 villages that now provide 25 litres of water a day each to about 1850 people. Now that the women do not have to walk for hours every day to collect water, they

have time to augment family income by weaving lontar packaging for the Rosella products and working in the production centre.

The main market for the products is the Bali Hotels Association, which has strongly supported the project from the beginning. About 40,000 boxes of Rosella tea were produced in 2010, as well as 4,000 boxes of sweets and 1,000 bottles of Rosella in syrup. Most of these were purchased by Bali's large hotels. Revenues from product sales are all re-invested in increasing production.

Guests at Bali's bigger hotels will find Munti Gunung's Rosella products in their mini-bars and the hotel shops. These not only make interesting gifts for visitors to take to their country, but also support sustainable livelihoods in one of Bali's poorest areas. So plan on taking a few packets home with you as a reminder of Bali's magic.

Munti Gunung's chemical-free Rosealla tea can be bought at Bali Buddha outlets or ordered products through Gillian at T: 082 145 710 084 or Candra at T: 081 227 916 750.