

Red berry works a miracle for patients

DAINTREE | Shane Nichols

THEY are officially called miracle fruit and when it comes to helping the tastebuds of cancer patients, that's pretty much what these red berries are.

They won't prevent or cure cancer but they are becoming increasingly recognised as a useful aid to improve the sensation of taste among people whose tastebuds have taken a pounding from radiation therapy.

It's not uncommon for patients to "go off" food when they have cancer treatment, due to a metallic taste in their mouth – but less nutrition can be another problem itself when the sick can least afford it.

But miracle fruit (*Synsephalum dulcificum*) are being hailed as a temporary friend of the tastebuds, by taking away the metallic taste and allowing the proper taste of food to come through.

You only need to taste one berry for up to a two-hour effect.

The news about these berries – which grow very readily in the tropics – took a step up this week with publication of a very laudatory article in the Miami Herald and the Chicago Tribune about the Miracle Fruit Farm in Florida which has been supplying the berries free to cancer patients since 1972.

Now the demand is so great they have had to move to commercial production.

The good news for Far North Queensland is that the berries' taste characteristics have been known about for years.

Diwan orchardists Chris Beckwith and Karen Pereira have miracle fruit on their property but only recently became aware of the fruit's usefulness.

This week they cryo-vaccated a small shipment of miracle fruit to send to a friend in Sydney who has cancer.

Now they are keen to get the message out there that the red berry has these very useful



Diwan orchardists Karen Pereira and partner Chris Beckwith, with miracle fruit grown on their farm

properties.

"It's not a business for us," said Chris Beckwith.

"We just want people to know about these berries and for them to become available to the people who really need them.

"People in the Daintree have been giving them out to tourists for years as a bit of a novelty but it turns out there's a much better purpose for them than that."

