



# Tempt your tastebuds at Atherton festival

**T**HE Tastes of the Tablelands Festival hosted by the Rotary Club of Atherton on Sunday, October 17 is an event not to be missed.

To be held at the Chinese Temple Grounds on Herberton Road from 10am-4pm, this event will showcase the best wines, coffees, cheeses, chocolates and other local produce that this wonderful region produces. It will also give an insight into some of the local businesses in the region.

This festival will also be a great opportunity to sample and purchase some of the varied and unique products that are produced on the Tableland.

If you want to wile away a few hours on a lazy Sunday afternoon, come and enjoy the entertainment provided for the day.

Enjoy the music by the Swamp Dogs or be entertained by young local artists.

Enjoy lunch (which you can purchase from the varied menus provided by local eateries and clubs) and sit at a table under the marquees or relax under the shady trees with a glass or two of local wine.

The site is licensed.

There will be a separate area set aside for those who wish to watch chefs cooking up a treat with local produce. Local vintage car and motorbike clubs will also be providing a display.

Tony Hermann, a world renowned ice carver, will also be demonstrating his skills at this festival.

The ladies will also be given a glimpse of the latest fashions in a fashion parade hosted by Blue Lagoon from Mareeba. Children will be catered for by a special children's section at the site.

As well as fashions on the stage, organisers will be hoping to see wonderful fashions on those who attend, as there will be prizes for best fashions of the day - ladies', men's and children's.

The Chinese Museum will also be open, and there will be an art display with local artists displaying their work in the Old Post Office.

This will be a great family day. Entry through the gate will cost \$7, with children under 12 free.

For more information phone (07) 4091 7757 or 0407 112 712.



Luscious produce from the Tableland region will be presented in Atherton on October 17.

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# Leading edge in seeds

**S**OUTHEDGE Seeds marketing manager Ross Newman manages the distribution of the largest range of Plant Variety Rights-accredited tropical legume and grass seeds in Australia for the Mareeba company started by John Rains.

Southedge Seeds is now at the forefront of improved pasture development in northern Australia.

Mr Rains is continually scouring the world for new species, and his latest find was Mekong Brizantha from Brazil.

It is a Brachiaria similar to signal grass, but more productive and palatable.

When well fertilised it can withstand heavy grazing. It flowers about eight weeks later than signal grass and produces twice the dry matter.

It is suitable for areas with a rainfall above 1000mm, reaches 1.2 metres in height and has stout, erect stems and broad leaves.

It will grow in a wide range of soil types and is tolerant of acid soils.

It can withstand more waterlogging than signal grass, but not as much as Tully humidicola.

Establishment time is similar to humidicola.

Another high-producing grass available from Southedge Seeds is Alto panicum, a species of guinea grass which yields of up to 84 tonnes of green matter and 1000kg dry matter/ha, making it the second largest grass producer after sugarcane.

Panicum is known for its palatability, response to fertiliser and tolerance of heavy stocking, but it cannot stand waterlogging or frosts.

In all, Southedge Seeds has a range of close to 30 grass species to suit all rainfall zones and soil types from Central Queensland to the Gulf, as well as 20 legume species and various mixes of

species that are available coated or uncoated.

Two of the legumes are Aztec Atro and Cardillo Centro.

Aztec Atro is a rust-resistant twining perennial legume with a deep root system. It is more cold tolerant than Siratro, with excellent spring growth, higher dry matter production and produces more seed, which gives it long-term persistence.

Cardillo Centro is also a twining perennial but as it roots down at the nodes it spreads vigorously and is harder for stock to pull out.

One of its greatest attributes is its ability to compete with vigorous grasses like humidicola and signal grass, and as it is more cold tolerant than common Centro, it is suited to wet coastal areas from Mackay north.

For more information contact Southedge Seeds on (07) 4093 2208 or visit the website: [www.southedgeseeds.com.au](http://www.southedgeseeds.com.au)

# Photosynthesis in the dark

## A question & answer series with Ken Bellamy

**Q: Does photosynthesis stop when there is no sunlight, or because of dense cloud cover?**

**A:** Photosynthesis is the natural process of living things capturing light and storing it in special energy compounds.

These special compounds - let's call them photon packs - are used for fuel when the organism converts carbon dioxide from the atmosphere into sugars.

Plants use these photon packs when they grow. But the photon pack may have been produced by the plant itself or by other organisms living nearby.

The mineral phosphorus is a key component of these photon packs, and must be available in the soil for photosynthesis to happen.

Phosphorus acts as a sort of battery for the photon pack and is exchanged as the energy in the pack is used.

Photon packs are 'charged up' by photons (light) and accept the charge by picking up a piece of phosphorus. When the pack is used, phosphorus is released. These packs can accept photon energy from any type of light. The light we see is only a small part of the total light spectrum, but even ultra-violet light and infrared light can be used for photosynthesis.

These two bands of light are not overly impacted by cloud cover. In fact, photon packs can even be charged at night, using reflected or re-radiated light which is not visible to the naked eye.

The trick is that plants use mostly visible light while other organisms use the other bands too. So the plant itself may slow down when visible sunlight fades but some of its neighbours can help pick up the slack.

Infra-red light can penetrate soil, so photosynthesis can be active in what we think is darkness.

Provided there are enough 'phototrophic' or photosynthetic bacteria

and other organisms which can accept non-visible light, photosynthesis can go on 24 hours a day.

Plants make friends with these organisms and even trade them enzymes and other substances for photon packs when there are enough of them present. This means that plants can share in a 'second wave' of photosynthesis-outsourced to soil organisms.

Increased overall photosynthetic activity results in greater capture of CO<sub>2</sub> from the air, greater sugar production and better growth all around.

As long as the right microbes are present around a plant, sugar production can happen day or night, light or dark ... just like it does on the dark and shady floor of a rainforest or deep in the ocean.

Build the microbes, share their photon packs and photosynthesis happens even in the dark.

Ken Bellamy is the director of Townsville-based biotech company Vital Resource Management.

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