

Mulga

Acacia aneura

Aboriginal people have used the hard wood of their local variety of Mulga to make spears, digging sticks and long narrow shields.

Mulga seeds can be eaten after cleaning and grinding them into a paste or roasting them over fire. The sugary gum from the tree can also be eaten or dissolved in water to make a sweet drink.

Blackwood

Acacia melanoxylon

The bark of the Blackwood can be heated in water to rub on sore joints to treat rheumatism.

The leaves have been used as soap, and when mixed with water can make a fish poison. The inner bark makes good fishing lines and string for spears and fishing nets.

The fine, hard wood can be made into clap sticks, spear throwers and shields.

Cunjevoi

Alocasia macrorrhizos

The swollen Cunjevoi stems are starchy and fibrous, but are poisonous if eaten raw. They cause the mouth and throat to swell, sometimes fatally.

To remove the poison, Aboriginal people pounded the roots and then roasted them in fire before eating, making Cunjevoi a valuable food source.

Bunya Pine

Araucaria bidwillii

The Bunya Pine produces chestnut-flavoured nuts which are encased in woody shells within the giant cone. These nuts are a rich source of protein and can be eaten raw or cooked.

Bunya nuts have been so popular that people once travelled hundreds of kilometres to where the trees grow around the Bunya Mountains in southern Queensland to share and feast on them.

Lemon Myrtle

Backhousia citriodora

While Lemon Myrtle is one of the most common bush foods used today, its traditional use is not well-documented. It is thought that Aboriginal people have used the leaves of the plants to season food, as they have a strong, lemon flavour.

Today the leaves and flowers are used to make tea and cordial as well as providing a citrus-like flavouring for cooking and baking.

Banksia

Banksia species

The flower-heads of many species of *Banksia* can be soaked in water to extract the nectar for a sweet, energy-boosting drink.

Old flower-heads have been used to strain drinking water or to carry fire over a distance, as the cones continue to smoulder for long periods.

While fresh, single flowers can be used as paint brushes for ceremonial makeup and painting

Bottle Tree

Brachychiton rupestris

The Bottle Tree survives in dry climates by storing water in the fibrous tissue of its trunk.

Aboriginal people have cut holes in the soft tree trunks, creating artificial reservoirs. They have also obtained water from the roots.

The starchy tissue of the stems and roots was eaten, as were the seeds after roasting in a fire to remove their hairs.

Native Cypress Pines

Callitris species

Aboriginal people across temperate Australia have used Cypress Pine resin as a cement-like adhesive in tool making, fastening barbs to reed spears and knife-blades, and axe-heads to handles.

The long branches of the tree can be made into canoe poles which double as fish spears. The bark can be made into rope, waistbelts and used to repel mosquitoes.

She-oak

Casuarina and *Allocasuarina*

The hard timber and resin from She-oaks is ideal for making and repairing tools like shields, clubs, spears and other wooden items.

Some Aboriginal groups have carved boomerangs from the roots of the trees using their natural curves.

In 1974, archaeologists found a 10,000 year old boomerang made from She-oak wood in Wylie Swamp, South Australia.

Flax Lily

Dianella species

Aboriginal groups across Australia have split and twisted the leaves of their local Flax Lily species together to form strong twine for basket making.

In many areas, the fruit of the Flax Lily is eaten when it ripens to blue.

In southern Australia, people boil the leaves to drink as a tea.

Soft Tree Fern

Dicksonia antarctica

The soft, pulpy tissue at the top of the trunk can be roasted or eaten raw.

It contains about 12 per cent starch, and has been a staple food for some Aboriginal groups in the past. However, removal of the growing heart can kill the plant.

Uncoiled young fronds can be eaten after roasting or steaming to remove toxins.

Sticky Hop Bush

Dodonaea viscosa

Aboriginal people in eastern Australia have used the juice of the root of this plant as a medicine to treat toothache, headache and cuts.

Chewed leaves and juice have been placed on stonefish or stingray stings and bound for several days to alleviate pain.

Central Australian groups have treated internal pains by placing the branches of the plant in an ash-pit with the patient laid on top to inhale the fumes.

GyMEA Lily

Doryanthes excelsa

The flowering stems grow up to four metres high at maturity. The stems were cut when they were young, at about half a metre high, and roasted. The roots were roasted and made into cakes to be eaten cold.

Nectar-feeding birds, attracted by the large, crimson flowers, were easily captured by hunters hiding under the large leaves with nets, and then cooked and eaten. The stems of the plant have been used medicinally to alleviate the pain of bluebottle stings and to make bandages.

Wombat Berry

Eustrephus latifolius

Aboriginal groups across eastern Australia have eaten the roots of Wombat Berry, which have a sweet, earthy flavour.

This twining plant produces yellow-orange fruits filled with a sweet, white pulp that is said to have a coconut flavour.

Austral Mulberry

Hedycarya angustifolia

The most important use of this mountain shrub has been as straight sticks for fire-drills. The sticks can be twirled between the hands while resting on another flat piece of wood, often the dry flowering stalk of the Grass Tree – producing fire within two minutes. The sticks have often been traded between Aboriginal communities.

The fruits resemble a yellow mulberry, but are not edible.

Native Rosella

Hibiscus heterophyllus

Aboriginal people in eastern Australia have widely used the tough, greyish bark fibre from Native Hibiscus to make into cord, woven dilly bags and fishing lines.

The sour flower buds, roots, shoots and leaves of young plants have been eaten raw or cooked. The leaves have also been used to make a refreshing drink.

Austral Indigo

Indigofera australis

Some Aboriginal groups have used Austral Indigo as a fish poison, crushing the leaves and roots and adding them to pools of water to stun and disable fish for easy catching.

The pink flowers have also been used as an effective dye.

Cabbage Tree Palm

Livistona australis

The chestnut-flavoured heart or growing tip of the Cabbage Palm has been eaten raw, boiled or roasted.

Aboriginal people have used the leaf fibres for twine for making bags, baskets, fishing lines and nets. Some people have also used the leaves to thatch roofs.

Early settlers who used the palm as a food source called it 'millionaire's cabbage', as removing the growing tip kills the plant.

Spiny-headed Mat-rush

Lomandra longifolia

The Spiny-headed Mat-rush has had many uses in Aboriginal cultures.

Women have gathered and split the smooth, strap-shaped leaves, tied them into bundles and soaked them to make the fibres pliable for weaving baskets, nets, traps and bags.

The white leaf-bases can be chewed for a sweet, starchy treat. The roots have been used to treat bites and stings. Seeds have been ground into flour or mixed with honey to provide a high-protein food.

Yam Daisy

Microseris lanceolata

The Yam Daisy has edible tubers that have long-been eaten raw or roasted to improve and sweeten their flavour.

The Yam Daisy was once a major staple food for south-eastern Australian Aboriginal people.

Once a common plant, the Yam Daisy has become scarce due to grazing by sheep.

Burrawang

Macrozamia species

Burrawang seeds are highly toxic but are rich in starch and very nutritious.

The seeds were treated before being used as an energy-rich food source. One method included pounding and soaking the seeds in running water for up to three weeks to remove the toxins. The pulp was then made into cakes and roasted for eating.

Geebung

Persoonia pinifolia

Sometimes known as ‘bush lollies’, the fruits of this and other *Persoonia* species have been a favoured food by Aboriginal people. When ripe, the fruit turns a deep purple colour and is soft and pulpy with a sweet taste. The hard seed at the centre of the fruit is discarded.

String and fishing lines can be soaked in Geebung bark infusion to strengthen them and prolong their use.

Plum Pine

Podocarpus elatus

The fleshy blue-black base on female Plum Pine cones has a subtle sweet plum-like flavour and has been highly valued by Aboriginal people. The flesh has a Vitamin C content of around 10%, with a hard inedible seed above.

Plum Pine fruit is often used by restaurants to add colour to sauces and it is used commercially to make jams, sauces and wine.

Native Raspberry

Rubus moluccanus

The sweet, tangy red fruit of the Native Raspberry can be gathered and eaten raw.

This species grows in rainforests, but others grow in drier forests and mountain areas.

The fruit has been used as a substitute for European raspberries.

Quandong

Santalum acuminatum

The Quandong is highly nutritious. Each small fruit contains a high concentration of Vitamin C.

The skin and flesh of the ripe fruit is relished and has been an important food for Aboriginal people in many parts of Australia. The dried fruit can be reconstituted with water and eaten.

The stone, when cracked open, reveals the kernel which can be mashed to an oily paste and used medicinally for aches and pains.

Lilly Pilly

Syzygium australe

The fleshy fruit of the Lilly Pilly can be eaten raw. It is a rich source of Vitamin C.

Lilly Pilly was among the first edible Australian plants to be mentioned in 1770 during Captain Cook's visit to Australia. It is still used today to make jam, sauces, syrups and confectionery.

Pepper Tree

Tasmannia insipida

The purple fruit of the Pepper Tree is edible with a sweet flavour, while the black seeds are hot and can be crushed to make a peppery spice.

The leaves can be eaten all year round, either fresh or dried. The leaves and crushed seeds have been used to flavour meat and other foods.

Grass Tree

Xanthorrhoea species

Aboriginal people have made use of every part of the Grass Tree. The stem of the flower spike has been used for fishing spears and for starting fires. The plant's resin can make a powerful glue for attaching fishing hooks to lines and blades to spear shafts.

The sweet nectar produced by the flowers is a high-energy food. Soaking the flower spike in water makes a sweet drink. The use of Grass Tree flowering spikes for navigation is still widely reported. The flowers act as a compass with those on the sunnier northern side of the spike opening before the flowers on the cooler southern side.

Seeds can be collected and crushed into flour.