



Local bushfood plants

Landcare Fact Sheet No.5

Many local plants have parts that can be eaten, commonly known as 'bushfoods'. This factsheet explores a range of bushfood plants but is not to be used as a definitive guide to what can be eaten as there are risks involved in eating wild foods and you should be completely sure of your plant identification skills and knowledge before trying anything! Some edible plant parts can cause serious long-term damage, for example the fruit of the Native Guava (*Rhodomyrta psidioides*) has been associated with a fungus that can cause blindness. Remember also that many bushfoods, although edible, taste quite awful and, as with our usual fruits, there can be an amazing variety of taste within a single species.

Some of the bushfood plants listed here may be growing naturally in Landcare sites and some you may like to plant in your garden. As well as providing interest and diversity in plantings, bushfood species are often popular with wildlife who can enjoy the fruits, seeds and leaves too.

| Plant name | Description |
|--|---|
| <i>Acacia longifolia</i> - Sydney Golden Wattle | <p>Both <i>Acacia longifolia</i> and <i>Acacia sophorae</i> (Coastal Wattle) are pioneer species that will quickly create shelter for other slower growing plants. Although short-lived, they seed so readily that they replace themselves in the coastal landscape. The seed of the wattles is the edible part and can be either eaten raw or processed into cooked seed or grainy flour for damper.</p> <p>Suitable for COASTAL sites.</p> |
| <i>Acmena smithii</i> - Creek Lilly Pilly | <p>This Lilly Pilly is quite common in many of the creeklines and rainforest pockets around Lake Macquarie. It can grow into a large, decorative tree in time, but in the home garden responds well to pruning or hedging. It forms a dense canopy and is a favoured roost tree for many of the local owl species. The taste of the fruit is extremely variable, but can be made into jam, chutney or sauce.</p> <p>Blue Lilly Pilly (<i>Syzygium oleosum</i>) and Magenta Lilly Pilly (<i>Syzygium paniculatum</i>) - a Threatened Species- both have edible fruits also.</p> <p>Suitable for RAINFOREST sites or sheltered COASTAL pockets.</p> |
| <i>Acronychia oblongifolia</i> - Common Acronychia | <p>This tree can grow large in time and is found in many of the littoral rainforest remnants around the Lake and some of the gully rainforest remnants. The leaves and fruit are aromatic with a lemony smell, and the fruit when fresh has an acid, lemon flavour (quite astringent). Many migratory frugivores (e.g. rainforest pigeons and fruit bats) are dependant on this food source.</p> <p>Suitable for RAINFOREST sites or sheltered COASTAL pockets.</p> |
| <i>Alectryon subcinereus</i> - Native Quince | <p>An attractive, medium to large tree with decorative fruit (green skin, red aril and black seed) and is found in most of the rainforest pockets in Newcastle / Lake Macquarie. The birds love it but some find the taste unpalatable.</p> <p>Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.</p> |



Acacia longifolia



Acmena smithii



Photo Greig, D
www.arb.gov.au

Acronychia oblongifolia

Plant name**Description**

Backhousia myrtifolia - Grey Myrtle

Overshadowed by its more illustrious cousin, *Backhousia citriodora*/Lemon Myrtle, the Grey Myrtle is commonly found growing as a rainforest edge species on the south to south-east facing slopes of the deeper valleys in the local area, where it can form an interesting mid-storey monoculture. A small to medium tree with massed white flowers, the leaf of this species is supposed to have a nutmeg flavour.

Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.

Banksia serrata- Old Man Banksia

The flowers of *Banksia serrata* and also *B. aemula* and *B. integrifolia* provide copious quantities of nectar for native fauna, and can be infused in water to provide a sweet drink. All of these trees can grow into large specimens in time, but will be dwarfed if grown in the front-line of coastal gales.

Suitable for COASTAL sites.

Cupaniopsis anacardioides- Tuckeroo

The Tuckeroo is a common tree in beachside and lakeside reserves, often in conjunction with the banksias mentioned above. It is one of the hardiest of the littoral rainforest species and like the banksias can grow into a medium/large tree if given a sheltered, moist site. The orange fruit which surrounds the seeds is supposedly edible, but is often dry and rather tasteless.

Suitable for COASTAL sites.

Diploglottis australis - Native Tamarind

A tall, almost palm-like, tropical-looking tree that can be found in sheltered gullies at Glenrock SCA, Green Point, Floraville, Bangalay Reserve and Warners Bay. The Native Tamarind produces masses of yellow/orange fruit every several years, which is most often noticed by the fallen fruit on the forest floor. Collecting the fallen fruit soon after it drops and before the ants get it, is the only practical way to gather the fruit. The fruit is quite acid and astringent, and would be most suited to making sauces. The fruit is popular with birds and bats.

Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.

Eupomatia laurina - Bolwarra

This glossy-leaved, understory/mid-storey rainforest shrub is common in nearly all the local rainforest pockets. It has a scented, white flower which turns into a globular, greenish yellow fruit which is only palatable when it is really soft and ripe. The Bolwarra is one of the native rainforest trees which is also called Native Guava. This shrub is a primitive legacy of the first flowering plants of Gondwana.

Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.

Ficus coronata - Creek Sandpaper Fig

Of all the local figs, the Creek Sandpaper Fig is the most palatable. Its blue-black fruit distinguishes it from Fraser's Fig (also edible) which has orange-red fruit, and Port Jackson Fig (also edible) which has yellow-orange fruit when ripe. None of the native figs are anywhere near as tasty as the Mediterranean fig, but again frugivores like Satin Bowerbirds, Regent Bowerbirds, Olive-backed Orioles, Southern Figbirds, Green Catbirds and fruit bats love them, so the figs are useful inclusions in riparian, habitat plantings. The distribution of the Sandpaper Figs locally is interesting with both types at Green Point, Galgabby Point/Galgabbee Creek, Bangalay Reserve and Glenrock SCA, and Fraser's Fig only at Salts Bay and Cams Wharf.

Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.

Hibiscus heterophyllus/
Hibiscus splendens - Native Hibiscus

Hibiscus heterophyllus, is a shrub with lobed leaves and pink/white, edible flowers, also called Native Rosella. *Hibiscus splendens* is a larger shrub/small tree with white flowers.

Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.



Photo Fagg, M
www.anbg.gov.au

Backhousia myrtifolia



Banksia serrata



Cupaniopsis anacardioides



Ficus coronata



Hibiscus heterophyllus

Myoporum insulare-
Boobialla

Myoporum insulare and also *M. acuminatum* often grow just behind the tidal zone occupied by mangroves along with *Casuarina glauca*/Swamp Oak. The larger growing species, *Myoporum acuminatum*, can also be found in dunal situations and littoral rainforest. Both species can be mistaken for Bitou by newcomers to the weeding game as both have glossy green leaves, but on closer examination the leaves are quite distinct and Boobialla has white flowers and blue/black/purple edible fruit.

Suitable for COASTAL sites.



Photo Fagg, M
www.anbg.gov.au

Myoporum insulare

Pouteria (Planchonella) australis - Black Apple

The Black Apple's fruit is the largest of all the local bushtucker fruits (about the size of a nectarine) and is blue/black with purplish flesh. It is found in most of the local rainforest pockets and the taste is variable. The ecologist, Tim Flannery, has a theory that where there are such large-fruited rainforest species, such as the Black Apple and the Davidson's Plum-*Davidsonia* spp. (which occur North of Coffs Harbour), it indicates a past distribution of a large frugivorous bird species like the Cassowary.

Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.

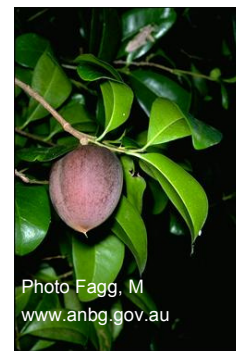


Photo Fagg, M
www.anbg.gov.au

Pouteria (Planchonella) australis

Sambucus australasica - Native Elderberry

This species is a shrub rather than a tree and has small yellow fruit which is among the tastiest of all the local bushtucker fruits. It is not common in the local rainforests and would be easily overlooked when not in flower or fruit.

Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.



Photo Fagg, M
www.anbg.gov.au

Sambucus australasica

GROUNDCOVERS/ FERNS/ GRASSES

Plant name

Description

Alpinia caerulea - Native Ginger

In appearance, Native Ginger is very much like the Asian Ginger we use in cooking and has a rhizome with a more delicate flavour that can be used in the same way. The Native Ginger has a small, blue, many-seeded fruit with little flesh that is also edible: Aboriginal trails in the coastal forests were supposedly edged by the Native Ginger plants, as the people chewed the fruit as they walked, and spat out the many seeds. The fruit would not satisfy hunger, but has a refreshing, slightly clove-like taste. The glossy leaves and "tropical" appearance make this plant a suitable, understory fill-in plant for a palm filled Gondwanan garden. It would be good around a pond as a frog habitat plant.

Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.



Photo www.anbg.gov.au

Alpinia caerulea

Blechnum indicum - Swamp Water Fern/
Bungwall Fern

The starchy rhizome of this fern was a staple food of local Aboriginal people. It is commonly found in the local area as a dominant groundcover in Swamp Mahogany/Paperbark forests and in Sydney Coastal Estuary Swamp Forest Complex, where the groundcover species are more diverse.

Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.

Vines/ creepers

Plant name

Billardiera scandens -
Common Appleberry

Description

This small climber/creeper can be found in a variety of forest types throughout the Lake Macquarie region from coastal heath to rainforest edges. It has small greenish fruit which is only edible when it turns a translucent brown. The name, Appleberry, describes the taste quite well (like apple sauce).

Suitable for RAINFOREST edges and COASTAL sites.

Carpobrotus glaucescens -
Pigface

This plant forms dense mats on sand dunes in full sun and wind exposed sites. It is an attractive sand-trapping groundcover which is often used as a pioneer plant in dunal reconstruction and is quite easily propagated by division. It has pink/mauve flowers and an edible fruit.

Suitable for COASTAL sites.

Commelina cyanea - Scurvy
Weed

A great groundcover with bright blue, small flowers that grows so prolifically that many people think it is a weed, confusing it with *Tradescantia albiflora* / Wandering Jew (which is generally white flowered). The leaves can supposedly be steamed and used as a vegetable, although (as with many wild greens) levels of oxalic acid may be a problem for regular consumption.

Suitable for RAINFOREST and COASTAL sites.

Dianella caerulea - Paroo Lily

A very popular landscaping plant, *Dianella* has sprays of bright blue berries in spring/summer. The berries are edible and refreshing in taste.

Suitable for RAINFOREST and COASTAL sites.

Lomandra longifolia - Mat
Rush

A reedy plant with edible stems.

Suitable for RAINFOREST and COASTAL sites.

Sesuvium portulacastrum - Sea
Purslane

An attractive groundcover with glossy leaves and pink flowers. The leaves can be steamed as a vegetable.

Suitable for COASTAL sites.

Tetragonia tetragonoides -
Warrigal Greens

Found growing in many of our foreshore reserves, usually under *Casuarina glauca*/Swamp Oak. The leaves can be either eaten as a vegetable or made into a pesto but must be blanched with cooking water discarded due to high oxalate content.

Suitable for COASTAL sites.

Viola hederacea - Native
Violet

An excellent groundcover with light blue/mauve/white flowers, depending on the soil type it's growing in. The flowers are edible and make an interesting garnish to a tossed salad.

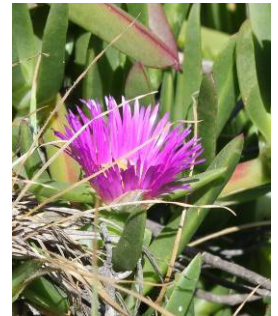
Suitable for RAINFOREST and COASTAL sites.

Xanthorrhoea spp - Grass
Trees

The distinctive shape of the Grass Tree is a feature of many of the coastal heaths from Awabakal Nature Reserve to Catherine Hill Bay. The nectar obtainable from the large flower spike is the only bush tucker that can be harvested without destroying the plant. As with the banksias, the nectar can be used to make a sweet drink.



Billardiera scandens



Carpobrotus glaucescens



Commelina cynea



Lomandra longifolia



Tetragonia tetragonoides

Plant name **Description**

Cissus hypoglauca - Native Grape, Water Vine
 Slender Grape (*Cayratia clematidea*), Kangaroo Grape (*Cissus antartica*) are also edible. None of the black-fruited Native Grapes are particularly palatable, but the vines are useful quick replacement plants as habitat where canopy is still intact. In sites where canopy has been lost or in revegetation projects, do not plant any of the Native Grapes early, as they will smother young shrub and tree growth.
 Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.



Cissus hypoglauca

Dioscorea transversa - Native Yam
 This is one of the bushtucker plants which you would have to dig up to access the edible tuber. It is a gentle climber or scrambler for the understorey/ mid-storey.
 Suitable for RAINFOREST and sheltered COASTAL sites.

Eustrephus latifolius - Wombat Berry
 A gently scrambling climber, Wombat Berry can be found in most of the bushland reserves around Lake Macquarie. The fruit is yellow-orange and not particularly tasty.
 Suitable for RAINFOREST and sheltered COASTAL sites.



Photo Fagg, M
 www.anbg.gov.au

Eustrephus latifolius

Maclura cochinchinensis - Cockspur Thorn
 An extremely thorny shrub/scrambler or climber depending upon the situation in which it is growing, Cockspur Thorn can be found locally at Awaba Bay, Green Point Foreshore Reserve, Glenrock SCA, Pelican Flat, Salts Bay, Galgabba Point and Cams Wharf. It has a tasty, orange fruit but don't eat too much of it!
 Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.



Maclura cochinchinensis

Passiflora herbertiana - Native Passionfruit
 You'll have to fight the possums for this one! Native Passionfruit is not as vigorous as the exotic varieties, some of which have become weeds, but it is an attractive scrambler/ climber with a similar flower and fruit to the South American species.
 Suitable for RAINFOREST and sheltered COASTAL sites.

Rubus parvifolius - Native Raspberry
 Also *Rubus hillii*. The Native Raspberries look quite similar to the weed species, Blackberry, but are usually not as vigorous. The fruit, which is red when ripe (Spring/Summer), is not in large numbers on individual plants, and varies considerably in taste: some being quite palatable. As with Black Apple, work is being undertaken with some Native Raspberries to develop a commercially viable variety.
 Suitable for RAINFOREST sites.



Rubus parvifolius

Water plants

Plant name **Description**

Typha spp. - Cumbungi
 The bulrush is extremely common locally, so much so that it is considered as a weed by stormwater maintenance crews. It grows prolifically in ponds and creeks, and is an extremely efficient sediment filter and nutrient extractor, as well as being habitat for frogs and wetland birds. All parts of the plant can be used as either fibre or food. The starchy tubers and shoots would have provided staple foods for Aboriginal people.



***Typha* spp**

| Plant name | Description |
|--|--|
| <i>Triglochin procera</i> - Water Ribbons | A prolific grower found in many of the local freshwater wetlands, and perhaps most easily seen on Ash Island from the tracks and boardwalks constructed by the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project. The tubers of the Water Ribbons are the edible part, either raw or roasted, and are often quite deep in the mud. |
| <i>Eleocharis</i> spp. - Spike Rushes | The most known spike rush as an edible species is <i>Eleocharis dulcis</i> - Chinese Water Chestnut, but this does not grow locally. Spike rushes grow in the shallow water on the edges of waterholes, dams and ponds, and again it is the starchy tuber that is harvested for food. Probably the best way to grow Typha, <i>Eleocharis</i> and <i>Triglochin</i> in a bush garden situation would be to plant each in separate containers in a nutrient-rich potting mix covered by gravel at the top to prevent muddying of the water, and then to immerse the containers in your pond or dam. This would overcome the tendency of any of the species to dominate the |
| <i>Marsilea</i> spp. - Nardoo | Although it looks nothing like it, this plant is actually a fern. Looking like an aquatic four-leafed clover, the flat leaves float on the water's surface. A starchy flour can be ground from the sporocarp or spore capsule of the plant, which can then be baked into a "pancake". According to Tim Low's <i>Wild Food Plants of Australia</i> (in the LRC library), "Nardoo is infamous as the food on which Burke and Wills starved to death." This is hardly a recommendation for inclusion in a bush tucker garden, but at least it would be a good floating shelter plant for frogs and tadpoles. |



Triglochin procera



Marsilea drummondii

References and further learning

- Wild Food In Australia by A. B. & J. W. Cribb,
- Wild Food Plants of Australia by Tim Low,
- Wild Lime: Cooking from the bushfood garden by Juleigh Robins,
- Wild Foods of the Lower Hunter Valley by Paul Melehan and Paul's course notes from the Bushfoods Workshop held at the LRO in July, 2003.

Also there is Yamuloong Bushtucker Garden at Garden Suburb to explore (website: www.yarnteen.com.au)



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