

Cultural Uses of Native Plants

Aboriginal people have used Australia's native plants for food, medicines, materials and tools for around 60,000 years. Many people enjoy creating a bush tucker garden to increase biodiversity, encourage native wildlife and to learn more about the Aboriginal culture.

The following table will help you in selecting native plants that have cultural uses.

COMMON NAMES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	CHARACTERISTICS
Alexandra palm	<i>Archontophoenix alexandrae</i>	The inner heart of the palm is edible after being peeled and cooked. The large sheath at the base of the leaves is used as plates or bowls. The leaves are woven into baskets and the timber is used for making spears.
Beach almond	<i>Terminalia catappa</i>	The seeds are edible after processing
Beach apricot	<i>Ximenia americana</i>	The plum like fruit turns yellow/ orange when it is ready to eat.
Beach sheoak	<i>Casurina equisetifolia</i>	The timber is used to make hand spears and firewood. The leaves and bark have medicinal properties.
Blackbean tree	<i>Castanospermum australe</i>	The fruits and seeds are toxic and need to be processed before consumption
Bloodwood	<i>Corymbia intermedia</i>	The bark is used for medicines, firewood and timber
Blue fig/poison fig	<i>Ficus albipila</i>	The blue edible fruits are covered in white hairs. Fighting shields were made from the wood of this tree
Blue quandong	<i>Elaeocarpus angustifolius</i>	The wood is used to make canoes and the blue/purple fruit are edible
Broad leafed native cherry	<i>Exocarpos latifolius</i>	This plant fruits in the summer and are red, yellow or orange
Bulrushes	<i>Typha</i> species	The young shoots are eaten raw. Pollen from the flowers is eaten raw or baked. The sap provides protection against leeches

MORE INFORMATION

Aboriginal Bush Resources Self-Guiding Plant Trail http://www.soe-townsville.org/town_common/foodtrail/

Nywaigi Country: Our plants and their cultural uses. Wet Tropics of North East Queensland Australia. Girringun Aboriginal Corporation and Nywaigi Land Corporation. 2011.

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Burdekin plum	<i>Pleiogynium timorense</i>	The fruit are eaten or made into a jam
Cloudy tea tree	<i>Melaleuca dealbata</i>	The flowers of the cloudy tea tree provide nectar. The leaves are used as a medicine and the bark is useful as insulation and carrying food and water
Cocky apple	<i>Planchonia careya</i>	The fibrous twigs once pounded, can be teased out to make a brush for painting or to make twine. The large fruit are edible. The bark is used to stun fish and it has medicinal properties
Hakea	<i>Hakea lorea</i>	The wood is used to make tools and weapons. This plant has medicinal properties
Cottonwood or native hibiscus	<i>Hibiscus tiliaceus</i>	The inner bark is used for string and fishing line. The wood is used for building rafts and firesticks
Crabs eyes	<i>Abrus precatorius</i>	The hard seeds were used by Aboriginals to decorate ceremonial objects. They are extremely poisonous
Cypress pine	<i>Callitris intratropica</i>	The bark, wood, sap and leaves are used for medicines, weapons and tools
Goats foot morning glory	<i>Ipomoea pes-caprae</i>	The root and leaves have medicinal properties and the root is also food
Quinine tree	<i>Petalostigma pubescens</i>	The wood is used for spear throwers and the fruit is used in medicines
Dogs balls	<i>Grewia retusifolia</i>	The fruit is boiled down to make medicinal drinks
Geebung or milky plum	<i>Persoonia falcata</i>	This plant is used for medicines and weapons
Herbert river cherry	<i>Antidesma bunius</i>	The edible fruit are ripe when they turn red to black
Jungle currant	<i>Antidesma ghaesembilla</i>	The jungle currant produces currant like fruit that provides an acid pulp around a central stone

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Leichhardt tree	<i>Nauclea orientalis</i>	An infusion of crushed leaves was used to treat "sore belly" by inducing vomiting. The bark was prepared to relieve rheumatic pain and bruising. The trunk was used to make canoes and the leaves were used to protect damper from ashes. Its flowers develop into edible fruit. Fish poisons are made from the bark and roots
Moreton Bay ash	<i>Corymbia tessellaris</i>	Gum trees are famous for their eucalyptus oil. Crushed leaves in hot water provide relief from colds and their timber was valuable for making hardwood tools. The wood is favoured for firewood and spears
Native passionfruit	<i>Passiflora foetida</i>	This vine produces small, tasty yellow fruits
Native rosella	<i>Abelmoschus moschatus</i>	This plant has edible leaves, shoots and roots
Native yam	<i>Dioscorea bulbifera</i>	The yam is eaten after cooking and is a good source of starch
Native grape	<i>Cayratia trifolia</i>	The purple/black fruit are edible
Nicker nut	<i>Caesalpinia bonduc</i>	The seeds can be eaten after processing and are used for necklaces. The bark is ground into a powder to treat aches and pains
Northern beefwood	<i>Grevillea striata</i>	The seeds are edible after processing and boomerangs were made from the root or basal areas. This tree has medicinal properties
Peanut tree or monkey nut	<i>Sterculia quadrifida</i>	This plant has medicinal manufacturing and nutritional use. The leaves and bark was made into twine and nets
Rock fig	<i>Ficus platypoda</i>	The rock fig provides edible fruits that are rather dry and tasteless unless soaked in water to make a pulp.

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Sandpaper fig	<i>Ficus opposita</i>	Its rough leaves are used for final smoothing of wooden tools and weapons. The fruit is eaten when ripe. The leaves were used for medicines
Screw palm	<i>Pandanus</i> species	The fruit is edible after roasting. The leaves were stripped into thin fibres to weave mats and baskets.
Cupania tree or beach tamarind	<i>Cupaniopsis anacardioides</i>	This has edible orange fruit
Wattle	<i>Acacia</i> species	Some wattles have edible gum which was soaked in water with honey to form a toffee. Roots were cooked and eaten and the wood was used for manufacturing weapons and tools. The red a yellow wattles are used for fibres to weave fishing string
Weeping tea tree or paperbark	<i>Melaleuca leucadendron</i>	The bark was used for shelters, bedding, slow burning torches and for carrying food and water
White apple	<i>Syzygium forte</i>	The fruit can be eaten raw or cooked. Fish poison is made from the bark, seed and leaves
Wild orange	<i>Capparis canescens</i>	The fruit is eaten the plant is used to make medicines

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