

Bush tucker

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Bush tucker, also called **bushfood**, is any food native to Australia and used as sustenance by the original inhabitants, the Aboriginal Australians, but it can also describe any native fauna or flora used for culinary and/or medicinal purposes, regardless of the continent or culture. Examples of Australian native animal foods (meats) include kangaroo, emu and crocodile. In particular, kangaroo is quite common and can be found in Australian supermarkets, often cheaper than beef. Other animals, for example goanna and witchetty grubs, were eaten by Aboriginal Australians. Fish and shellfish are culinary features of the Australian coastal communities.

Examples of Australian native plant foods include the fruits quandong, kutjera, muntries, riberry, Davidson's plum, and finger lime. Native spices include lemon myrtle, mountain pepper, and aniseed myrtle. A popular leafy vegetable is warrigal greens. Nuts include bunya nut, and the most identifiable bush tucker plant harvested and sold in large-scale commercial quantities is the macadamia nut. Knowledge of Aboriginal uses of fungi is meagre but beefsteak fungus and native "bread" (a fungus also), were certainly eaten.



Bush tucker, Alice Springs Desert Park

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Traditional Aboriginal use

Aboriginal Australians have eaten native animal and plant foods for an estimated 60,000 years of human habitation on the Australian continent (*see Indigenous Australian food groups, Australian Aboriginal sweet foods*). Various traditional methods of processing and cooking are used. Toxic seeds, such as *Cycas media* and Moreton Bay chestnut, are processed to remove the toxins and render them safe to eat. Many foods are also baked in the hot campfire coals, or baked for several hours in ground ovens. "Paperbark", the bark of *Melaleuca* species, is widely used for wrapping food placed in ground ovens. Bush bread was made by males using many types of seeds, nuts and corns to process a flour or dough to make bread.

Aboriginal traditional native food use has been severely impacted by non-indigenous immigration since 1788, especially in the more densely colonised areas of south-eastern Australia. There, the introduction of non-native foods to Aboriginals has resulted in an almost complete abandonment of native foods by Aboriginals. This impact on traditional foods has been further accentuated by the loss of traditional lands which has resulted in reduced access to native foods by Aboriginals and destruction of native habitat for agriculture.

The recent recognition of the nutritional and gourmet value of native foods by non-indigenous Australians is introducing native cuisine to many for the first time.

Colonial use

Bush tucker provided a source of nutrition to the non-indigenous colonial settlers, often supplementing meager rations. However, bushfoods were often considered to be inferior by colonists unfamiliar with the new land's food ingredients, generally preferring familiar foods from their homelands.

In the 19th century English botanist, J.D. Hooker, writing of Australian plants in *Flora of Tasmania*, remarked although "eatable," are not "fit to eat". In 1889, botanist Joseph Maiden reiterated this sentiment with the comment on native food plants "nothing to boast of as eatables."^[1] The first monograph to be published on the flora of Australia reported the lack of edible plants on the first page, where it presented *Billardiera scandens* as, "... almost the only wild eatable fruit of the country".^[2]

This became the accepted view of Australian native food plants until the late 20th century. It is thought that these early assessments were a result of encountering strong flavours not generally suitable for out-of-hand eating, but these strong flavours are now highly regarded for culinary use.

The only Australian native plant food developed and cropped on a large scale is the macadamia nut, with the

first small-scale commercial plantation being planted in Australia in the 1880s. Subsequently, Hawaii was where the macadamia was commercially developed to its greatest extent from stock imported from Australia.

Modern use

In the 1970s non-indigenous Australians began to recognise the previously overlooked native Australian foods. Textbooks like *Wildfoods in Australia* by the botanist couple Cribb & Cribb were popular. In the late 1970s horticulturists started to assess native food-plants for commercial use and cultivation.

In 1980 South Australia legalised the sale of kangaroo meat for human consumption. Analysis showed that a variety of bushfoods were exceptionally nutritious.^[3] In the mid-1980s several Sydney restaurants began using native Australian ingredients in recipes more familiar to non-indigenous tastes – providing the first opportunity for bushfoods to be tried by non-indigenous Australians on a serious gourmet level. This led to the realisation that many strongly flavoured native food plants have spice-like qualities.

Following popular TV programs on "bush tucker", a surge in interest in the late 1980s saw the publication of books like *Bushfood: Aboriginal Food and Herbal Medicine* by Jennifer Isaacs, *The Bushfood Handbook* and *Uniquely Australian* by Vic Chirikoff, and *Wild Food Plants of Australia* by Tim Low.

Bush tucker ingredients were initially harvested from the wild, but cultivated sources have become increasingly important to provide sustainable supplies for a growing market, with some Aboriginal communities also involved in the supply chain. However, despite the industry being founded on Aboriginal knowledge of the plants, Aboriginal participation in the commercial sale of bush tucker is currently still marginal, and mostly at the supply end of value chains. Organisations are working to increase Aboriginal participation in the bush tucker market. Gourmet style processed food and dried food have been developed for the domestic and export markets.

The term "bushfood" is one of several terms describing native Australian food, evolving from the older-style "bush tucker" which was used in the 1970s and 1980s.

Media

TV shows made use of the bush tucker theme. Malcolm Douglas was one of the first presenters to show how to 'live off the land' in the Australian Outback. Major Les Hiddins, a retired Australian Army soldier popularised the idea of bush tucker as an interesting food resource. He presented a hit TV series called *The Bush Tucker Man* on the ABC TV network in the late 1980s. In the series, Hiddins demonstrated his research for NORFORCE in identifying foods which might sustain or augment army forces in the northern Australian Outback. 'NORFORCE' is a Regional Force Surveillance Unit of the Australian Army Reserve.

In early 2003, the first cooking show featuring authentic Australian foods and called *Dining Downunder* was produced by Vic Chirikoff and Bailey Park Productions of Toronto, Canada. This was followed by the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) production of *Message Stick* with Aboriginal chef, Mark Olive.



Billardiera scandens

Ray Mears recently made a survival television series called *Ray Mears Goes Walkabout* which focused on the history of survival in Australia, with a focus on bush tucker. In the series, Les Hiddins was a guest in one episode, with the two men sharing their knowledge and discussing various aspects of bush tucker.

In the TV survival series "Survivorman" host and narrator, Les Stroud, spend time in the Australian outback, after successfully finding and eating a witchetty grub raw he found many more and cooked them, stating they were much better cooked. After cooking in hot embers of his fire, he removed the head and the hind of the grub and squeezed out thick yellow liquid before eating.

Native Australian food-plants listed by culinary province and plant part

Australian bush tucker plants can be divided into several distinct and large regional culinary provinces. Please note, some species listed grow across several climatic boundaries.

Top-end

Monsoonal zone of the Northern Territory, Cape York and North-western Australia.

Fruits

| | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Adansonia gregorii</i> | Boab |
| <i>Buchanania arborescens</i> | |
| <i>Citrus gracilis</i> | Kakadu Lime |
| <i>Eugenia carissoides</i> | Cedar Bay Cherry |
| <i>Ficus racemosa</i> | Cluster Fig |
| <i>Manilkara kaukii</i> | Wongi |
| <i>Melastoma affine</i> | Blue Tongue |
| <i>Mimusops elengi</i> | Tanjong |
| <i>Morinda citrifolia</i> | Great Morinda |
| <i>Physalis minima</i> | Native Gooseberry |
| <i>Terminalia ferdinandiana</i> | Kakadu Plum |
| <i>Syzygium erythrocalyx</i> | Johnstone's River Satinash |
| <i>Syzygium fibrosum</i> | Fibrous Satinash |
| <i>Syzygium suborbiculare</i> | Lady Apple |



Great Morinda

Vegetables

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Dioscorea alata</i> | Purple yam |
| <i>Dioscorea bulbifera</i> | Round yam |
| <i>Dioscorea transversa</i> | Pencil yam, Long yam |
| <i>Eleocharis</i> spp. | Spikerush |
| <i>Ipomoea aquatica</i> | Water spinach |

Nelumbo nucifera lotus
Nymphaea macrosperma water lily

Nuts

Cycas media Cycad palm seeds (Require detoxification: see Bush bread)
Semecarpus australiensis Australian Cashew
Terminalia catappa Sea Almond

Spices

Eucalyptus staigeriana Lemon Ironbark
Melaleuca leucadendra Weeping Paperbark
Melaleuca viridiflora Kitcha-kontoo
Ocimum tenuiflorum Native Basil

Outback Australia

Arid and semi-arid zones of the low rainfall interior.

Fruits

Capparis spp. Native Caper, Caperbush
Capparis mitchellii Wild orange
Capparis spinosa
subsp. nummularia Wild passionfruit
Carissa lanceolata Bush plum, Conkerberry
Citrus glauca Desert Lime
Enchylaena tomentosa Ruby Saltbush
Ficus platypoda Desert Fig
Marsdenia australis Doubah, Bush Banana
Owenia acidula Emu Apple
Santalum acuminatum Quandong, Desert or Sweet Quandong
Santalum murrayanum Bitter Quandong
Solanum centrale Akudjura, Australian Desert Raisin, Bush
 tomato
Solanum
cleistogarnum Bush tomato
Solanum ellipticum Bush tomato

Vegetables



Desert Quandong



Bush Tomatoes

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| <i>Calandrinia balonensis</i> | Parakeelya |
| <i>Ipomoea costata</i> | Bush potato |
| <i>Vigna lanceolata</i> | Pencil Yam |
| <i>Lepidium</i> spp. | Peppercresses |
| <i>Portulaca intraterranea</i> | Large Pigweed |

Seeds

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Acacia aneura</i> | Mulga |
| <i>Acacia colei</i> | |
| <i>Acacia coriacea</i> | Dogwood |
| <i>Acacia holosericea</i> | Strap Wattle |
| <i>Acacia kempeana</i> | Witchetty Bush |
| <i>Acacia murrayana</i> | |
| <i>Acacia pycnantha</i> | |
| <i>Acacia retinodes</i> | |
| <i>Acacia tetragonophylla</i> | Dead finish seed |
| <i>Acacia victoriae</i> | Gundabluey, Prickly wattle |
| <i>Brachychiton populneus</i> | Kurrajong |
| <i>Panicum decompositum</i> | native millet |
| <i>Portulaca oleracea</i> | Pigweed |
| <i>Triodia</i> spp. | commonly known as spinifex |

Spices

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Eucalyptus polybractea</i> | Blue-leaved Mallee |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|

Insects in gall

- Bush coconut
- Mulga apple

Eastern Australia

Subtropical rainforests of New South Wales to the wet tropics of Northern Queensland.

Fruit

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Acronychia acidula</i> | Lemon Aspen |
| <i>Acronychia oblongifolia</i> | White Aspen |
| <i>Antidesma bunius</i> | Herbet River Cherry |
| <i>Archirhodomlyrtus beckleri</i> | Rose Myrtle |

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Austromyrtus dulcis</i> | Midyim |
| <i>Carpobrotus glaucescens</i> | Pigface |
| <i>Citrus australasica</i> | Finger Lime |
| <i>Citrus australis</i> | Dooja |
| <i>Davidsonia jerseyana</i> | New South Wales Davidson's Plum |
| <i>Davidsonia johnsonii</i> | Smooth Davidsonia |
| <i>Davidsonia pruriens</i> | North Queensland Davidson's Plum |
| <i>Diploglottis campbellii</i> | Small-leaf Tamarind |
| <i>Eupomatia laurina</i> | Bolwarra |
| <i>Ficus coronata</i> | Sandpaper Fig |
| <i>Melodorum leichhardtii</i> | Zig Zag Vine |
| <i>Pleiogynium timoriense</i> | Burdekin Plum |
| <i>Podocarpus elatus</i> | Illawarra Plum |
| <i>Planchonella australis</i> | Black Apple |
| <i>Rubus moluccanus</i> | Broad-leaf Bramble |
| <i>Rubus probus</i> | Atherton Raspberry |
| <i>Rubus rosifolius</i> | Rose-leaf Bramble |
| <i>Syzygium australe</i> | Brush Cherry |
| <i>Syzygium luehmannii</i> | Riberry |
| <i>Syzygium paniculatum</i> | Magenta Lilly Pilly |
| <i>Ximenia americana</i> | Yellow Plum |



Lemon Aspen



Finger Lime

Vegetable

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Apium prostratum</i> | Sea Celery |
| <i>Commelina cyanea</i> | Scurvy Weed |
| <i>Geitonoplesium cymosum</i> | Scrambling Lily |
| <i>Tetragonia tetragonoides</i> | Warrigal Greens |
| <i>Trachymene incisa</i> | Wild Parsnip |
| <i>Urtica incisa</i> | Scrub Nettle |

Spices

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Alpinia caerulea</i> | Native Ginger |
| <i>Backhousia citriodora</i> | Lemon Myrtle |
| <i>Backhousia myrtifolia</i> | Cinnamon Myrtle |
| <i>Leptospermum liversidgei</i> | Lemon Tea-tree |
| <i>Prostanthera incisa</i> | Cut-leaf Mintbush |
| <i>Smilax glyciphylla</i> | Sweet Sarsaparilla |
| <i>Syzygium anisatum</i> | Aniseed Myrtle |

Tasmannia stipitata Dorrigo pepper (leaf and pepperberry)

Nut

Araucaria bidwillii Bunya Nut

Athertonia diversifolia Atherton Almond

Macadamia integrifolia Macadamia Nut

Macadamia tetraphylla Bush Nut

Sterculia quadrifida Peanut Tree



Lemon Myrtle

Temperate Australia

Warm and cool temperate zones of southern Australia, including Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria and the highlands of New South Wales.

Fruit

Acrotriche depressa Native Currant

Billardiera cymosa Sweet Apple-berry

Billardiera longiflora Purple Apple-berry

Billardiera scandens Common Apple-berry

Carpobrotus rossii Karkalla

Exocarpus cupressiformis Native Cherry

Gaultheria hispida Snow Berry

Kunzea pomifera Muntries

Rubus parvifolius Pink-flowered Native Raspberry

Sambucus gaudichaudiana White Elderberry

Seed

Acacia longifolia Golden Rods

Acacia sophorae Coast Wattle

Spice

Eucalyptus dives Peppermint Gum

Eucalyptus olida Strawberry Gum

Eucalyptus globulus Tasmanian Blue Gum

Mentha australis River Mint

Prostanthera rotundifolia Native Thyme

Tasmannia lanceolata Mountain pepper



Seeds of *Acacia longifolia*

Tasmannia stipitata Dorrigo Pepper

Vegetable

Apium insulare Flinders Island Celery

Atriplex cinerea Grey Saltbush

Burchardia umbellata Milkmaids

Eustrephus latifolius Wombat berry

Microseris lanceolata Murnong

See also

- Australian Aboriginal sweet foods
- Bush bread
- Bushfood industry history
- Bushmeat
- Bush medicine
- Damper (food)
- Indigenous Australian food groups
- Country food (equivalent term in Canada)

References

Footnotes

1. Maiden, J.H., *The Useful Native Plants of Australia*, 1889, p.1
2. Smith, J E (1793). *Spec. Bot. New Holland*. James Sowerby. "AMID all the beauty and variety which the vegetable productions of New Holland display in such profusion, there has not yet been discovered a proportionable degree of usefulness to mankind, at least with respect to food."
3. Low, T., *Wild Food Plants of Australia*, Angus & Robertson, 1992, pp 199–202 ISBN 0-207-16930-6

Notations

- Bruneteau, Jean-Paul, *Tukka, Real Australian Food*, ISBN 0-207-18966-8.
- Cherkoff, Vic, *The Bushfood Handbook*, ISBN 0-646-15496-6.
- Isaacs, Jennifer, *Bushfood*, Weldon, Sydney.
- Kersh, Jennice and Raymond, *Edna's Table*, ISBN 0-7336-0539-7.
- Low, Tim, *Wild Food Plants of Australia*, ISBN 978-0-207-14383-0

External links

- Bush Tucker in the northern Tropics of Australia (<http://en.travelnt.com/experience/aboriginal-culture/bushtucker-tropics.aspx>)
- Popular Native Foods from Australian Flavour (http://australianflavour.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=64&Itemid=54)

- www.indigenoustralia.info – The Travel Around Company (<http://www.indigenoustralia.info/>)
- Australian Bushfood and Native Medicine Forum (<http://www.bushfood.net/>)
- Australian Bushfood Recipes (<http://nativetastes.at.hm/lemon-myrtle/australian-bushfood-recipes/>)
- Aboriginal women's knowledge (<http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/walabunnba/wantangka.shtml>)
- CSIRO plant profiles (<https://web.archive.org/web/20060819082114/http://www.cse.csiro.au/research/nativefoods/crops/index.htm>)
- Site of an industry pioneer (<http://www.cherikoff.net/>)
- Bushfoods Magazine (<http://ausbushfoods.com/>)
- Eat Australia (<http://eataustralia.info>)
- Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (<http://www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au>)
- Australian Bush Survival website with book recommendations (http://www.survival.org.au/books_top_two.php)

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