

Bushfood snippets from the Bushfood and Coastal Resources Conference

(Bushfood Gardening Conference #5!), held on 27 March 2021

Valdene Diprose

The following info is compiled from talks by Steven McCabe (Sustainability presenter), Dale Tilbrook (a Wardandi Bibbulmun woman) and Bree Howard (Natural Area Nursery), with some input from the attendees.

Native bush tucker

1. *Agonis flexuosa* [Western Australian Peppermint, Swan River Peppermint] Noongar people know the tree as Wanil, Wonnow, Wonong or Wannang. Used by early European settlers to make tea. Noongars used the leaves for medicinal purposes – as an antiseptic and a decongestant.
2. *Apium prostratum* [Sea Celery]
<https://florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au/browse/profile/6211>
The most popular plant distributed at the 'Kitchen Wetland Conference' in 2018, it was described scientifically from a specimen growing in Empress Josephine's garden in Malmaison. Can be propagated from seeds, though you should make sure it is not too wet during germination. Germination will take about eight weeks. Adult plants prefers very poorly drained (boggy/swampy) soils such as wetlands/damp lands, just make sure the green parts stay above the surface of the soil.
<https://www.facebook.com/GardenEcologist/posts/3628704910577244>
<https://archive.org/details/JardindelaMalmallVent?view=theater#page/81/mode/2up> There is a Declared Rare subspecies of this celery:
<https://florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au/browse/profile/13614>
3. *Atriplex* [Saltbush]
This genus of plants hold salt in their leaves, and they will grow in areas affected by soil salination. Grey saltbush (*A. cinerea*) has been used as bushfood in Australia since prehistoric times. It is easily propagated by cuttings, though plants are more resilient if they are grown from seed. A particularly good flavouring for lamb.
4. *Banksia grandis* [Bull Banksia]
Noongar people know this tree as beera, biara, boongura, gwangia, pira or peera. Each of the immense flowerheads yields up to one tablespoon of nectar. Apparently, Aboriginal men were one of the main pollinators of this species. The pollen would be caught in their beards when the nectar was sucked from the flower heads. Banksias need care in propagation. Good quality seeds require a smoke treatment. The roots do not like being disturbed, so plant seeds in a good-sized pot. Use a free draining soil to prevent root rot.
5. *Carpobrotus virescens* [Bain, Pigface or Angular Pigface]
Pink pigface is the endemic to WA, but it hybridises easily with more vigorous, yellow flowering South African varieties. Traditionally, pigface leaves were not used as a

food by Noongar people, but as a medicine to alleviate bites. It is particularly good with bull ant stings. It produces a fruit which can be quite pleasant tasting if the plant is not growing on salty sand.

6. *Centella asiatica* [Gotu Kola, Brahmi, Pennywort]
Pennywort is found in wet, swampy areas in Australia and is widespread in temperate and tropical regions throughout the world. It grows well in damp, shady areas of the garden but does not like frost. Can be used in salads and as a substitute for spinach.
7. *Cymbopogon oblectus* [Silkyheads, Native Lemon Grass]
Native lemongrass can be used as a decongestant and an antiseptic.
The leaves can be rubbed into a ball and placed in the nostrils to relieve colds.
8. *Dioscorea hastifolia* [Warran, Warrain, Native Yam]
<https://florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au/browse/profile/1509>
The subject of the Inaugural Bushfood Gardening Conference 'Yam Conference' in 2016. A perennial climber. Warran emerges in the cooler months and retreats to a tuber over the hotter drier months. Do not throw it out at this time - it is not dead! These plants are either male or female and both are required for seed production, but it can be easily propagated by cutting the tubers into setts. I recommend growing Warran in deep pots or in good fertile soil (rich soil suitable for vegetables). It can be difficult to establish in the ground. Tubers establish fairly deep underground (that's why pots are good!) Check out 'Yam Lands - Mysteries of a holy landscape' (2020) by *Anthropology From The Shed*, it's great!
<https://anthropologyfromtheshed.com/project/indigenous-yam-cultivators-of-southwestern-australia/>
9. *Diplolaena dampieri*
<https://florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au/browse/profile/4454>
Some call this Dampier's Rose but it is in the same family as oranges and lemons, Rutaceae. Its crushed leaves can make a good addition to gin and tonic.
10. *Enchylaena tomentosa* [Ruby Saltbush]
A spreading ground cover that can also be grown successfully in hanging baskets. Produces edible red berries in autumn. The berries may be eaten raw or soaked in water to make a sweet tea. The leaves are also edible, but they should be blanched before eating because they are rich in oxalates. The foliage is good for smoking food.
11. *Platysace deflexa* [Youlk]
<https://florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au/browse/profile/6250>
The focus-species of the 'Roots Conference' in 2017. Youlk absolutely requires free-draining soil. Sand in a pot is not OK (the plants will die) but potting mix works well. Use a soil wetting agent. Will grow along the Perth coastal plain in alkaline soils. When a youlk tuber is harvested, the plant and roots that are left behind will grow new plants.
Ask questions and share your successes on The Youlk Grower's Club Facebook

Page: <https://www.facebook.com/Youlk-Growers-Club-359268831134596>

Have a look at them spilling out of the ground here (the plant Dr Woodall is holding when he is talking is 'Kulyu' a WA-native sweet potato, not Youlk):

<https://www.facebook.com/LandlineABC/videos/1301883703205207>

12. *Pteridium esculentum* [Bracken fern]
The green fronds can be rubbed onto stings to alleviate itching.
13. *Samphire Tecticornia* [Sea Asparagus]
A genus of succulent, salt tolerant plants largely endemic to Australia. Can be propagated from seeds and cuttings, with care. Slow growing and benefits from periodic treatments of salt – about every eight weeks.
14. *Santalum acuminatum* [Quandong tree]
To grow from seed: Gently crack the pod in a vice. Soak the seed for 24 hours and then place in a plastic bag in the sun. Propagate in the shade. They are prone to fungal rot and prefer cool nights. Quandongs need a host – Acacia are good, but mulberry trees are apparently an ideal host.
15. *Tetragonia tetragonioides* [Warrigal Greens, New Zealand spinach, Botany Bay greens] A useful substitute for spinach. Very vigorous and will spread rapidly once established. Leaves contain oxalic acid and may need to be blanched before use, though not everyone bothers. Young leaves can be used without blanching.
<https://www.abc.net.au/gardening/factsheets/home-grown/10393114>
16. *Podocarpus drouynianus* [Koolah, Emu Plum]
<https://florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au/browse/profile/86>.
A rainforest relic conifer native to the southwest of WA. Related to the Illawarra Plum (*Podocarpus elatus*) from over east. These plants are either male or female.

Invasive bush tucker

1. *Cakile maritima* [Sea rocket/Sea Mustard]
From Northern Africa and temperate Europe. The leaves, stems, flower buds and immature seedpods can be eaten, raw or cooked. They are rich in vitamin C but have a very bitter mustardy taste.
<https://florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au/browse/profile/3002>
2. *Trachyandra divaricata* [Onion Weed]
Can be an acceptable asparagus substitute but while it is in the same order as Asparagus (Asparagales), it is in the same family as bulbine lilies and aloes. It is more closely related to many of our native lilies and Xanthorrhoea than to asparagus.
<https://florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au/browse/profile/1368>
There are traditional food uses of several plants in this genus in South Africa
(See for *T. falcata* here: <http://pza.sanbi.org/trachyandra-falcata>)