

Bushfood & Coastal Resources Conference – Perth NRM

(Bushfood Gardening Conference #5!)

Saturday 27th March 2021, 9.30am – 3.30pm at Floreat Surf Lifesaving Club

Report from Mike Gregson

Several members of CCA attended this conference at the Floreat Lifesaving Club on Saturday 27th March.

Dale Tillbrook welcomed us to the conference and to Whadjuk Noongar country, and gave us an overview of some of the sources of bush tucker that could be found close to the coast.

Dr John Huisman, curator at the WA Herbarium, then gave us a very detailed account of our local seaweeds or macro-algae. He talked about the different phyla of seaweeds (red, brown and green), the early history of collection off the coast of WA, beginning with Archibald Menzies and Robert Brown who sailed with Matthew Flinders. Then he talked about the uses, culinary and otherwise, of many seaweeds, including nori for making sushi, the manufacture of agar and carrageenin, and how the early settlers made jelly from our local Jelly Weed. Then there is the amazing story of *Asparagopsis taxiformis*, which, when added to cattle feed, reduces the cows' methane production by 95%, which is wonderful news for ameliorating Climate Change. Many of our seaweeds, such as Sea Lettuce *Ulva lactuca*, are edible, but anything contaminated with cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) can be toxic.

Dale then returned to tell us about traditional uses of marine and coastal resources, pointing out that fish and shellfish were “bush tucker” too. Now, in the cooler season of Djeran, the people would be starting to move up the rivers towards the hills, fishing for mullet as they moved. They ate the berries of *Enchylaena* and *Rhagodia* and the central leaves of the Sword Sedge and many other foods such as Samphire, Saltbush and Nitre Bush. They breathed the smoke of burning Peppermint leaves as a decongestant and used the tips of Bracken Fern to relieve stings.

Bree Howard then told us about the Natural Area Nursery at Ellenbrook. They not only have a nursery, but do planting, weed and erosion control, fencing, feral animal control and consulting. They include bush-tucker species and specialise in hard-to-grow plants such as tuber-bearing species. She reminded us that seed-collecting requires a licence and permission from the landholder. Native plant seeds should be planted virtually on the surface, not over-watered, and planted out after the first true leaves appear. Sowing time is variable and needs to be experimented with. Some species take as long as 12 weeks to germinate, and *Banksia* seed needs to be smoked. It is usually best to grow from seed, but sometimes cuttings are best, and the Wildflower society runs cuttings workshops. We were warned that our local Pigface hybridises with the South African species. Ruby Saltbush can be grown at home in hanging baskets. Quandong grows slowly. Its seed has to be cracked and planted with a host. (The Kwongan Foundation can help with this.)

Report from Valdene Diprose

Speakers included Bree Howard from Natural Area Nursery – a private company situated in Whiteman Park.

They grow 900,000 native plants annually, including 50 bush tucker species.

Bree's advice to the home gardener when propagating plants by cuttings:

- Use good quality plants when they are not flowering.
- Take cuttings at the beginning of the day (especially in summer).
- If cutting at the base of a stem, cut flat at the bottom of a node (below a leaf stem). When cutting at the top of a stem, cut at an angle.
- Dip cuttings ends in honey, hormone rooting powder, or an aspirin solution (approx 75 gm in one litre of water – soak for 30 min). A combination of honey & aspirin can be used. Experiment to find what works best on different species.
- Keep cuttings moist but not wet.
- Use a mixture of peat and perlite.
- Pots can be covered with a cut-off plastic container (e.g. cool drink bottle).

Trapped condensation means you only need to water once a week.

According to Bree, growing edibles from seeds can be trickier – seeds may require smoke treatment. Obtaining good quality viable seed can be challenging and collection licences may be required. She suggested buying from Seed Shed (Donnybrook), Nindethana Nursery (Albany) and Seed West (Wanneroo).

Dale Tilbrook, a Wardandi Bibbulmun woman whose traditional Aboriginal country is the Margaret River, Busselton area, and her brother, Lyall catered for the conference. We were treated to a delicious lunch flavoured with bush tucker foods: Fresh Pink Snapper infused with Lemon Myrtle, Sea Grapes, Pickled Youlk, Potato Salad flavoured with Warrigal Greens, mini vegetarian pies with Warrigal Greens and Sea Celery and a green salad flavoured with Samphire. There were also chocolate biscuits flavoured with Wattle Seed and a Lemon Myrtle cake.

<https://daletilbrookexperiences.com.au/>

Snippets about local plants (info from Dale, Bree and the audience)

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.