

Bush TUCKER

Native Australian bush foods are often overlooked when it comes to cooking, but many are delicious, supernutritious and easy to grow. By Beverley Hadgraft

Mention bush foods and most people think witchetty grubs.

But some of the most nutrient-packed superfoods in the world grow wild in Australia. Here, we reveal just how healthy they are and how you can use them.



KAKADU OR BILLYGOAT PLUM

This small light yellow or green plum is one of the most highly regarded superfoods in the world. The Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation (RIRDC), a government body which has studied Australian bush foods, has found the Kakadu plum to be an outstandingly rich source of antioxidants, in particular vitamin C. It contains around 3000-5000mg per 100g, compared to around 93mg in a large orange.

Also high in folate, lutein and the essential minerals magnesium, calcium and iron, kakadu plum is now available in supplement form as a powder and in capsules.

"Growing up in the Kimberley region, we used to eat these like nobody's business," says Samantha Martin, author of Bush Tucker Guide. "They taste like a tangy dried apricot

and when fresh they can be made into smoothies, fruit salads or stewed with meats. They also have antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal properties," explains Martin. Indigenous Australians put the crushed flesh of kakadu plum on wounds to speed healing, but it's also possible to find them in soaps, skin lotions and ointments, she says.



MUNTRIES OR NATIVE CRANBERRIES

These berries grow prolifically on the South Australian coast. "When ripe they smell of roasting apple and cinnamon and that's what they taste like," says environmental scientist and native food fan, Julie Weatherhead. "When you poach them the flavour intensifies."

Farmers are now growing muntries commercially and they're available online. They can be used anywhere you'd use apples or sultanas but you don't need too many as the flavour is so intense. They're also highly nutritious, containing around four times the antioxidants of blueberries.



LEMON MYRTLE

Avocado is usually recommended as our primary source of lutein – a compound important for eye health and for preventing macular degeneration

– but the RIRDC found that lemon myrtle contained even higher levels.

It's also rich in folate, vitamin E, zinc, magnesium and calcium. "Lemon myrtle is also four to six times higher in antioxidants than green tea," adds Weatherhead. "Put a leaf in hot water to release the minerals and make a tonic with no tannins."

She encourages people to grow more native edibles in their home gardens and lemon myrtle is top of her list. "It's my hero of the bush foods," says Martin. "It has antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties and tastes beautiful. My favourite is lemon myrtle cheesecake – just add the powder to your normal mix. It's also good in crumble bases, biscuits and cakes and you can use the leaves in a similar way to bay leaves in marinades, soups, stews, casseroles and roasts."



WATTLESEED

Wattleseed contains high levels of magnesium, zinc, calcium, iron and selenium.

It grows so well in dry, desert conditions, and yet it's so nutritious, says Martin.

It has a beautiful fragrance and flavour, like coffee and hazelnuts with a hint of chocolate. "I like it crushed in damper," she says, adding that it can also be made into a drink or used to flavour ice-creams, butters or sauces. .



LILLY PILLY BERRIES

Most of us discard lilly pilli berries, letting them fall to the ground for the birds. That's a waste as some varieties, such as the riberry (*Syzygium luehmannii*), contain essential minerals and phytochemicals and have a similar antioxidant capacity to blueberries, helping to protect our bodies against oxidative stress.

The riberry is one of the few lilly pilli berries that can be eaten fresh, says Weatherhead. "It has a delicious taste like cloves and cinnamon. A lot of lilly pillies are high in tannins, though, and need to be boiled up into jellies and jams."

"Aboriginal people commonly refer to the berries as 'medicine berries' because they

Where to buy

Bushfoodsensations.net has an extensive list of growers and suppliers of native edibles.

Outbackchef.com.au provides recipes, information and products.

To grow your own native edibles, visit a local nursery or check out the map on ausbushfoods.com to see what grows where.

Don't experiment with bush fruits or herbs unless you've identified them and ensured they're not toxic.

keep their immune systems healthy," adds Martin. "They're long-lasting and are okay to eat up to two weeks after being picked.

"I like to deseed them and put them into muffins with white chocolate. They're a great replacement for raspberries or blueberries," she says. "Check with your nursery or go online to check that the ones you are growing are edible."



FINGER LIMES AND DESERT LIMES

Finger limes, also known as citrus caviar, have become a delicacy in smart restaurants, says Martin. "They're used as a garnish for anything from champagne to oysters and will elevate your cooking to another realm." The zingy little balls of flesh come in an assortment of colours from lime to blood orange.

Finger limes are high in vitamin C, as are desert limes, which are also a rich source of folate – 10 times greater than blueberries, according to the RIRDC report. Desert limes have no peel so are easy to prepare and are the quickest citrus tree species in the world to fruit after flowering. They work well in drinks, sorbets and seafood dishes.



WARRIGAL GREENS

Eating this nutritious plant helped stop the first settlers developing scurvy, says Weatherhead. "People make the mistake of keeping it growing as a perennial but if you do that, the oxalic acid builds up and it

tastes bitter. It's best to pull it out in the autumn, let the seeds fall and get a rejuvenated plant. When it's fresh it's yummy when blanched and used like spinach. I also make a pesto from it."



BUSH TOMATOES

"Horticulturalists have bred many fruits and vegetables so they are bigger and look better but are subsequently full of water, with a diluted nutritional value," says Weatherhead. Our native edibles haven't been changed so although they're still small, they've retained high nutrition levels and flavour.

Bush tomatoes are an example of that. About the size of a cherry tomato, they're a great source of iron and selenium, says the RIRDC. "They have an intense, smooth, citrusy, sun-dried tomato flavour," adds Martin. "They're brilliant in gravies, stocks and casseroles."



KANGAROO APPLE

This grows all over southern Australia and looks like a tree tomato. The leaves contain natural progesterone and were used by Aboriginal women as a contraceptive. Today the tree is commercially harvested and used to make contraceptives and anti-inflammatory products overseas.

The fruit, which must only be eaten when very ripe, is high in oestrogen. Weatherhead says she'd like to see research done on the fruit as it may help ease menopausal symptoms.



MOUNTAIN PEPPER

You can eat both the leaf and the berries from this tree, which grows in southern NSW, Victoria and Tasmania. The leaf is used like a curry leaf, while the pepper can be used like normal pepper, to add a unique flavour to dukkah or even to make a tea. According to the RIRDC's scientists, it's high in antioxidants, vitamin E and essential minerals.