

Bush Tucker of the Wet Tropics

The Ma:Mu Rainforest Aboriginal people's traditional lands are around Innisfail, Palmerston and Millaa Millaa areas. The area's volcanic soils and high rainfall have produced some of the most diverse tropical rainforest in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. These forests traditionally provided a rich source of food, particularly in wetter months when animals were difficult to hunt. Even today when the easy option is to shop in a supermarket, Ma:Mu people gather and prepare these foods because it is still part of their culture and they enjoy eating their traditional foods.

Bush tucker has also become big business. Restaurants are serving entire menus based on Australian native foods and it is now possible to buy rainforest fruit foods in supermarkets. Ma:Mu horticultural trainees at Innisfail TAFE are collecting wild rainforest fruits and domesticating them to produce commercially viable fruits for farmers to harvest and sell. Some of these plants are shown here.

A wide range of animals including possums, tree-kangaroos and many birds including the endangered cassowary dine on these fruits. If you plant them on your property you will probably attract wildlife to your backyard.

BEWARE! There are many poisonous plants in the rainforest. Rainforest Aboriginal Elders are very concerned that adventurous naturalists may sample some bush tucker and poison themselves. It is unwise to sample bush tucker unless you are absolutely certain what you're eating.

For more information

- Visit the Ma:Mu Bush Tucker Garden at Warrima Lakes, Innisfail
- Innisfail Campus Tropical North Queensland TAFE, PO Box 1453 Innisfail 4860 Phone (07) 4043 8622
- Society for Growing Australian Plants
www.sgapqld.org.au/bushtucker.html
- James Cook University's Agroforestry and Novel Crops Unit
<http://cnsfse01.jcu.edu.au/schools/tropbio/index.html>
roger.leakey@jcu.edu.au Phone (07) 4042 1573
- Native Foods Association of FNQ Inc. PO Box 150 Malanda 4885 Mobile (0429) 121212

Books

- Grow Your Own Bush Foods - Keith and Irene Smith, New Holland, 1999
- Wild Food Plants of Australia - Tim Low, Angus & Robertson, 1991
- A Guide to Traditional Aboriginal Rainforest Plant Use - The Kuku Yalanji, Mossman Gorge Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Inc., 1995

The fruit illustrations were reproduced from Fruits of the Rainforest with the kind permission of William and Wendy Cooper. This artwork will form part of an expanded volume of over 2000 rainforest fruits by the Coopers to be published in 2004.

Bush Tucker of the Wet Tropics

LARGE TREES (20-35 metres)

Cluster Fig - *Ficus racemosa*

Fruit up to 40 mm wide

This huge tree's massive root system helps it to survive in drier rainforests and beach areas in Australia and Asia. Its fleshy fruit grow in big clusters along the branches and trunk, with 2-3 crops from May to Jan. Ripe fruit smells similar to commercial figs and the mildly sweet flesh is edible fresh or dried. Attractive to many birds and bats.



Blue Quandong - *Elaeocarpus grandis*

15-25 mm wide

Tree grows up to 45m and is found from NSW to New Guinea. Its finely serrated leaves turn red before falling to the ground. Trees tend to have two crops between Aug and April. Separate the fruit's bright blue skin from the green flesh. It is best when slightly over-ripe and soft, or it can taste a bit sharp. Inside is a rough, woody stone containing up to five seeds.



Cherry Satinash - *Syzygium luehmanii*

7-10 mm wide

Also known as Riberry and Creek Cherry, this slow growing tree reaches 35m and is found from the Wet Tropics to northern NSW. It has flaky bark and bright pink or red new leaf growth. Pink, pear-shaped fruit 3-4 cm long appear between Nov and March. The tree is related to the clove tree from Indonesia. The flesh tastes slightly spicy, making excellent jams or sauces served with either meat or icecream.

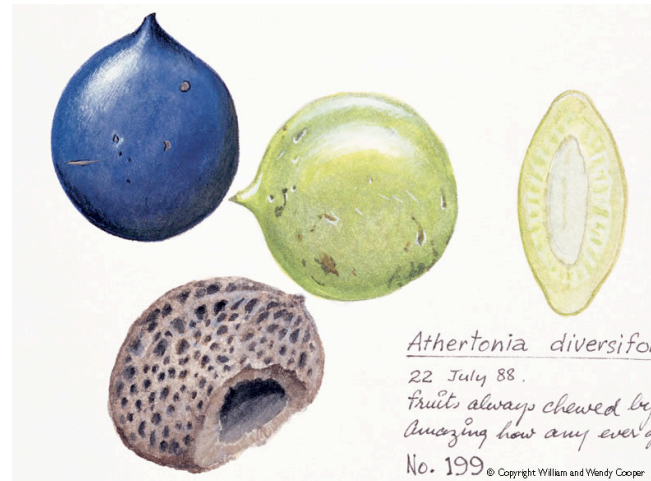


Bush Tucker of the Wet Tropics

Atherton Oak - *Athertonia diversifolia*

40 x 35 mm

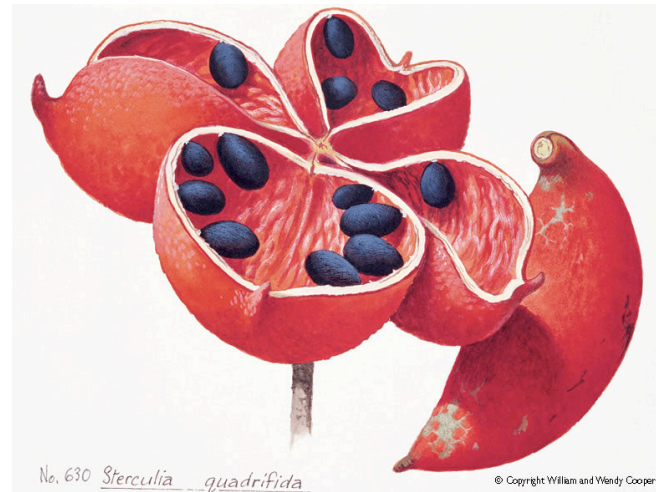
Tree grows to 25m, and is found in wet forests of the south east Tablelands, Mt Lewis and lowland Daintree. Fruits ripen from Nov to Feb. Fruits have a blue skin with a dryish white flesh surrounding a hard shell. Inside is an edible kernel that can be eaten raw or roasted. The nuts also make a tasty addition to cakes, biscuits and desserts. Also eaten by Musky Rat-kangaroos and native rats.



Peanut Tree - *Sterculia quadrifida*

50-80 x 30-40 mm

This tree grows up to 20m in drier monsoon forests of Cape York, WA, NT, the Wet Tropics and as far south as northern NSW. Its leaves have mostly dropped off by the time the tree bears fruit around Oct-Nov. The large orange or scarlet pod has a velvety surface and splits open to release several dark, bluish-black seeds. These delicious seeds have a nutty flavour and can be eaten raw or cooked.



Banana Fig (also known as Karpe Fig and Gabi Fig) - *Ficus pleurocarpa*

35-65 x 15-25 mm

This spreading tree grows to 35m and may act as a strangler of other trees. It is found only between Cape Tribulation and Tully. Its large, oblong fleshy fruit contains many small seeds. The fruit turns from yellow to orange and red as it ripens. These fruit are tasty at the fully ripe red stage and can be eaten fresh or dried.



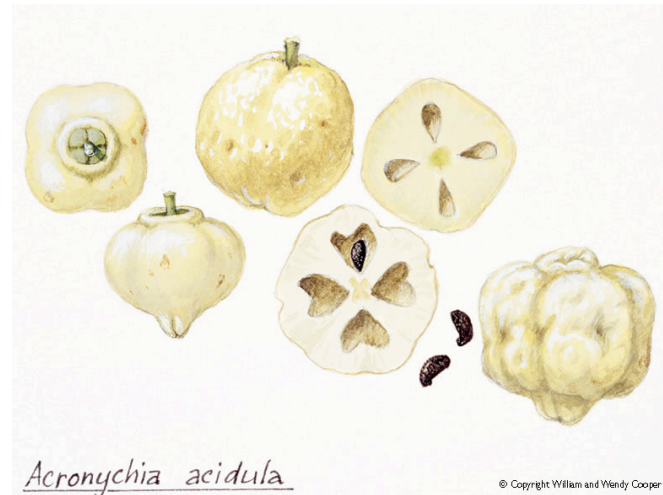
Bush Tucker of the Wet Tropics

TREES (10-20 metres)

Lemon Aspen - *Acronychia acidula*

20 mm wide

Lemon Aspen grows to 18m and is found from the Wet Tropics to central Qld. The irregularly shaped fruit may have up to four seeds and appears from April to Sept. Cut fruit has a lemon scent and a tangy flavour. The flesh is best stewed with sugar for marmalade, dressings, sauces and cordials.



Burdekin Plum - *Pleiogynium timorense*

20-25 x 20-40 mm

Tree grows to 20m in drier rainforests from southern Qld to Cape York and SE Asia. Its large, dark reddish purple to black fruits look like miniature pumpkins. A thin layer of flesh covers a distinctive woody case. They ripen from May to Oct and the flesh, which has a plum-like taste, softens and sweetens after harvest. It can be eaten fresh or made into jams, desserts, cordials and wines.



Boonji Tamarind - *Diploglottis bracteata*

up to 60 x 45 mm

This tree grows to 15m and is only found between Cairns and Innisfail and on the Atherton Tableland. The fruit capsule ripens in Dec-Jan, splitting into three segments each containing a seed which is surrounded by edible orange flesh. This makes excellent salad garnish, sauces, chutneys and desserts. Musky Rat-kangaroos and Cassowaries also eat the fruit.



Bush Tucker of the Wet Tropics

GIANT HERB

Native Banana - *Musa banksii*

85-135 mm long

This fleshy plant grows to 6m and is similar to commercially cultivated bananas, except these native plants produce very slender small bananas with many seeds. The bananas ripen from Feb to July and are sweet to eat when fully ripe.



CLIMBERS

Millaa Millaa Vine - *Elaeagnus triflora*

up to 20 x 12 mm

The leaves of this shrubby, woody climber have distinctive silvery or coppery undersides. The red, fleshy, oblong fruit appear from July to Jan. They are speckled with fawn or gold dots and have a single seed. Flesh has a sweet-savoury taste but only when fully ripe (deep red). Makes excellent sauces and condiments. Also favoured by the Lumholtz Tree-kangaroo.



Acid Drop Vine - *Melodorum leichhardtii* (syn. *Rauwenhoffia leichhardtii*)

40-60 mm long.

This tall, woody climber has leaves with sparse, rusty hairs on the underside. Several segmented, orange, fleshy fruits 4-6 cm long appear at any time of the year. The flesh is edible and has a variety of uses.



Bush Tucker of the Wet Tropics

SHRUBS & TREES (to 10 metres)

Red Beech - *Dillenia alata*

40-50 mm wide

Tree grows to 10m in wet areas along the Wet Tropics coast, Cape York and New Guinea. It has shiny leaves, papery red bark and bright yellow flowers. Fruits have 6-8 red segments and inside, the small brown seeds and white flesh are edible. Fruits throughout the year.



Brown Pine - *Podocarpus dispersus*

up to 60 mm long

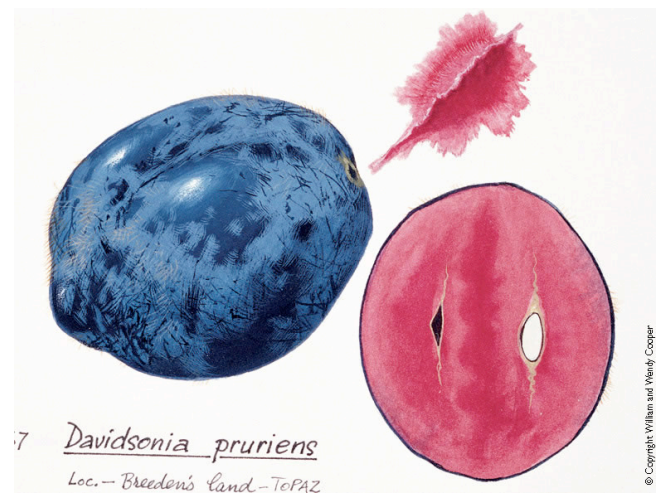
Understorey tree about 6m high found only on the Tablelands and the Bellenden Ker Range. These primitive trees don't look like conifers - they have long, glossy leaves and the 'fruit' is actually a very swollen stalk. This large, fleshy red globe has a hard, green seed attached underneath. Fruits appear from July to Dec. The red flesh is sweet and succulent when eaten straight from the tree and makes excellent desserts and syrups. The seeds can be roasted.



Davidson's Plum - *Davidsonia pruriens*

30-50 x 40-60 mm

Understorey rainforest tree 5-8m tall. Produces a purple, hairy-skinned fruit with deep red flesh at any time of the year. The sour flesh makes excellent jam, wine, sauces and desserts and is used to flavour yoghurt. Davidson's Plum occurs in north Qld, also in southern Qld and northern NSW.



Bush Tucker of the Wet Tropics

Johnstone River Satinash- *Syzygium erythrocalyx*

40-80 x 30-70 mm

This tree can grow to 15m and is only found in the Wet Tropics, although it has become common in suburban gardens. It has attractive, shaving-brush shaped flowers which sprout from the trunk and branches. The large, fleshy red fruits ripen between Sept and Feb and make tasty jams and desserts.



Herbert River Cherry - *Antidesma bunius*

12-25 mm long

This understorey tree grows to 10m and occurs from the Wet Tropics north to Asia, usually in drier forests and rainforest margins. Male and female flowers occur on separate plants. Succulent red fruit is ripe from Feb to Oct. The sweet tasting flesh smells like apple and makes excellent jams and jellies or can be eaten straight from the tree.



Cheese Fruit - *Morinda citrifolia*

50-100 x 40-60 mm

Also known as Noni and Great Morinda, this tree grows to 10m in drier rainforests in northern Australia and the Asia Pacific. It produces large yellow fruit up to 8cm wide from June to Sept. When ripe, the translucent flesh smells like rotten blue-vein cheese. It attracts flying foxes which disperse the seeds. The fruit has high levels of vitamin C and is famous as a medicine for many ailments including colds and diarrhoea and as a poultice for wounds.

