

# Bush Foods

Bush foods are Australian foods that are native to our environment. They are found all over the country, and there are around 10,000 species of native plants that have been recorded as being used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for food, fibre, medicine, shelter and ceremonial purposes.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a deep knowledge of the plants in their Country and have used this knowledge to sustain their culture for well over 60,000 years. As interest grows in bush foods, more and more of us are becoming familiar with the edible native plants in our landscape.

## **Bush foods are adapted to the natural environment in Australia**

**Soil** - They are adapted to our soils, so don't need extra fertilisers to survive. Some - like the salty samphire plant - are able to thrive in salty soils that many other food plants would never be able to survive in. Many bush foods can survive in other types of soil that conventionally grown foods would seriously struggle in, including very dry or sandy soils.

**Water** - Bush foods are also adapted to the amount of water in our environment. Many have evolved to withstand long periods of drought, as well as high temperatures. Where many supermarket foods require regular water to retain their lush green foliage, many bush foods are happy without much water.

**Biodiversity** - Bush foods have evolved in our landscape alongside native animals and other plants. They are often critical food sources for native birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects. Some of the animals eat the same parts of the plants that we like to eat - like native berries or plums - but farmers can think creatively and imaginatively to come up with ways to share bush foods with native animals while still having enough to sell (e.g. by having most of their plants for producing food to sell but having a few that feed the wildlife).

**Pollinators** - Bush foods plants have evolved very important relationships with the animals who help to pollinate them (called pollinators). Native bees are very important pollinators. There are around 2,000 species of native bees, many of whom are now very rare. By planting bush foods, we can help these species recover and thrive.

**Pests** - Some bush foods are susceptible to pests, but this is usually because there is an imbalance in the environment (e.g. poor soil health, loss of other native species or introduced animals). However, crops grown for conventional agriculture are usually not native and are susceptible to a wide variety of pests. Farmers try to manage these pests by spraying their crops. This spray can harm native insects and wash into nearby waterways, where it may pollute the water.



# Climate Change and Bush Foods

Climate change is a big and scary problem for our planet and its people. But because of this, people are looking for alternative ways of doing things. Conventional agriculture (the way most food products in the supermarket are grown) is responsible for 13% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions (rising greenhouse gas emissions in our atmosphere are heating up our planet and causing the climate to change). Native bush food plants have several benefits in terms of climate change:



- Firstly, because bush foods are already adapted to our current climate, they are the plants most likely to be able to survive changes in our climate. This includes being able to survive heat waves and droughts.
- Conventional farming of the types of foods we normally see in the supermarket (e.g. wheat for bread, lettuce, bananas) requires chemicals to grow (e.g. nitrogen fertilisers) that contribute to climate change. Because bush foods are adapted to our environment and soils, they don't need these chemicals and, therefore, don't have the same impacts on climate change.
- A lot of the food that is stocked in the supermarket comes from overseas (e.g. noodles from Thailand, rice from China, pasta from Italy). All this shipping of food around the world creates greenhouse gas emissions, but if we are consuming food grown in Australia, there will be fewer emissions from the food that we eat. Bush foods are an obvious choice here.



# Jobs and Economy

The value of the bush food industry is growing rapidly and is expected to boom in the next few years. More and more people are wanting to eat bush foods, but it's not always easy to find them. We need more farmers who are willing to try bush foods and more people willing to eat them. We also need people who are promoting them, creating recipes and cooking with them so that we all learn more about how easy they are to use and how delicious they taste.



When land is cleared of native vegetation for conventional agriculture, we lose so much, not just the plants that are removed, but the relationships between plants, between plants and animals, between healthy soils and healthy plants, landscapes and waterways. We also lose cultural elements important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Planting bush foods offers opportunities in terms of the health of our environment, as well as creating opportunities for us all to work together to feed our people and care for our land.



In addition, because growing bush foods require specific knowledge - knowledge that is held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples - it is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples be included in the ways bush foods are grown and used and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to be employed in the bush foods industry.



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