

Mai-yurnungga Garden

First Nations Food and Medicine Garden

In Kurna language, "Mai-yurnungga" means "place of native food."



Our garden contains a large number of Australian plants that are significant for their uses as food, medicine or for cultural purposes. Many are native to the Adelaide Region. Below is a list of the plants that can be found in our garden and the ways they can be used.

Ruby Saltbush

Enchylaena tomentosa

Ruby Saltbush is a hardy plant that grows all over mainland Australia. It grows berries that are yellow to red in colour and taste salty-sweet. They can be eaten fresh or soaked in water to make a tea. The leaves are also edible, but the leaves should be cooked before eating.

Old Man Saltbush

Atriplex nummularia

Old Man Saltbush is native to inland Australia and is a hardy, drought-tolerant plant. The leaves are edible and have a salty flavour. They can be used to season meat, bread and salads, or as a wrap for grilling. Old Man Saltbush was a food source for Aboriginal peoples, used in a variety of ways. Its leaves and seeds were used in damper and leaves used as poultice for burns.

Seaberry Saltbush

Rhagodia candolleana

Seaberry Saltbush grows in South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia and can be particularly found in coastal locations. Its small red berries were a food source for Aboriginal peoples and are also popular with birdlife and lizards.

Ross' Noon Flower/Pigface (Kurna name: Karkalla)

Carpobrotus rossii

Ross' Noon Flowers are native to South Australia. The entire plant is edible, being a staple of Indigenous bush tucker. Its fruit has a similar taste to sweet figs or salted strawberries and is often boiled into jams. First Nations Peoples used the juice from the leaves historically as a remedy for insect bites, burns, and stings, as it has similar qualities to aloe vera.

Rounded Noon Flower/Round-leaved Pigface

Disphyma crassifolium

Sometimes also referred to as Karkalla, Round-leaved Pigface is a succulent found throughout southern Australia. Its fruit was favoured by Aboriginal peoples, particularly the sweet pulp. The leaves are also edible, served with meat, in salads or stir-fry.

Lilly Pilly

Syzygium australe

The Lilly Pilly is native to Queensland and New South Wales. Its berries contain high levels of Vitamin C and can be used in a variety of ways including eaten raw, made into jam or baked into cakes or muffins. Lilly Pilly has been used in Aboriginal medicine for many generations to treat sore ears, wounds and skin conditions.

Lemon Myrtle

Backhousia citriodora

Lemon Myrtle is native to Queensland and has been used by Aboriginal peoples as a food source and medicine for thousands of years. Its intensely lemon flavoured leaves can be used in teas, biscuits, cakes, sauces and meat dishes. Rich in antioxidants, anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial, lemon myrtle has been used traditionally to relieve stomach discomfort, cold symptoms, congestion and for wound healing. It is also used as an insect deterrent.

Anise Myrtle

Syzygium anisatum

Anise myrtle is a rainforest tree known for its aromatic leaves, which have a strong aniseed or licorice scent and flavour. They can be used fresh or dried to flavour both sweet and savoury dishes. Aboriginal Australians used anise myrtle for its soothing properties. Infusions made from the leaves were used to treat digestive issues, coughs, and colds.

Black Anther Flax-Lily (Kurna Name: Peintuk)

Dianella revoluta

Black Anther Flax-Lily is native to South Australia and its leaves contain strong fibres that can be made into string and were woven by Kurna peoples into nets, bags and baskets. Kurna peoples also boiled the roots to use as a cold remedy. The berries can be eaten and used as a blue dye.

Muntries (Kurna Name: Mantirri)

Kunzea pomifera

Muntries are a staple food source for Kurna, Ngarrindjeri and other First Nations peoples, growing along the southern coast of Australia. The berries are small and turn purple when ripe and taste like spicy apple. They are high in antioxidants and vitamin C. Muntries work well in salads and with cheese, as a jam or filling in pies and muffins.

River Mint

Mentha Australis

River Mint is a Native Australian herb that is unique for its perennial qualities. It has a minty strong aroma like peppermint and spearmint. In a culinary and Indigenous context, it is a bushfood substitute for mint in salads, dressing, tea, and desserts. It was used by Aboriginal peoples as a medicinal herb to ease cough and colds. It was also used as an insect repellent. It can be found near rivers and damp areas in the regions of the Murray Darling Basin waterways.



Slender Mint

Mentha diemenica

Slender mint has a strong flavour and is a versatile plant favoured by First Nations peoples for its culinary and medicinal qualities. It grows in grasslands and forest regions of South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. It can be used in a similar way other mint plants in a variety of dishes and as a garnish.

Bush Basil

Plectranthus graveolens

This low-growing, spreading shrub can be found down the East coast of Australia, from Cape York Peninsula down to NSW. Traditionally used by First Nations peoples in ceremonies and as a medicine, bush basil can be used in a variety of ways as a food source. The young, green leaves taste similar to basil with a hint of mint and sage. Young leaves can be added to pizzas, in a pasta sauce or blended with pine nuts to make a pesto. The leaves can also be dried to use as a herb.

Native Rosemary/Coastal Daisy Bush

Olearia axillaris

Native or wild rosemary was given its name by European colonists who thought it resembled English rosemary in both taste and appearance. Its leaves can be used both fresh and dried in a variety of foods. It was used by Aboriginal peoples as a rub in insect repellent. It grows in coastal area around South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania.

Cut Leaf Mint/Native Thyme

Prostanthera incisa

The cut leaf mint, also known as native thyme, is found along the NSW coastline, particularly in forest areas. Prized by Aboriginal communities as a medicinal herb, it can also be used in cooking and herbal teas. It tastes minty, but with a more complex flavour including hints of pepper. It pairs well with meats such as chicken, fish and lamb.

Sea Parsley

Apium prostratum

Sea Parsley was eaten by Captain Cook and early colonists to help prevent scurvy and provide a 'leafy green' to eat in the completely different climate from Europe in which they landed. It grows along the southern coastline of Australia. A close relative of European parsley but with a strong peppery taste, it is used in a similar way, as a garnish and to flavour soups, salads, chicken and seafood dishes. Stems can be eaten fresh or blanched (to weaken the strong flavour), while seeds can also be used as a cooking spice.

Sea Celery

Apium annuum

Sea Celery, also known as annual celery, is a coastal species native to Australia that can be used as a flavoursome herb or vegetable. Sea Celery is native to the southern and eastern coasts of Australia, growing on the sand beaches and salt marshes in South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. Australian First Nations people traditionally harvested its tender leaves, stems, roots and seeds for seasoning food and medicinal purposes. Today, it frequently used in soups, salads, sauces and seafood dishes as a flavourful, salty alternative to European celery.

Native Lemongrass

Cymbopogon ambiguus

Native Lemongrass is an aromatic grass that releases a strong lemon scent when its leaves are crushed. It grows throughout Australia except in cool temperate regions. Used by Aboriginal peoples to treat chest infections and skin sores, it works well steeped in hot water and inhaled to aid congestion. Its essential oils can be found in many commercially available soaps, shampoos and moisturisers. Native lemongrass is versatile in cooking, used as a cooking herb and ingredient in soups, curries, sauces, marinades and cakes.

Spotted Emu Bush, Silky Emu Bush, Yellow Emu Bush

Eremophila maculata, Eremophila nivea, Eremophila maculata aurea

Emu bush is a valued medicinal and ceremonial plant for many Australian First Nations groups. Uses include for sores and wounds, relieving the symptoms of colds and headaches, and smoked to create a suitable environment for new mothers and their babies. In Central Australia it was used in various ways in ceremony.

Yam Daisy (Kurna name: Kantara)

Microseris lanceolata

The yam daisy, commonly known as murrnong from the Woiwurrung language (Wurundjeri people), was an important staple as part of the diet of many Aboriginal peoples in southern Australia. The roots grow into tubers that are high in starch. They were collected using digging sticks and cooked, although they can be eaten raw as well. The introduction of cattle to Australia and the resulting destruction of habitat has made this once prolific plant more difficult to find in the wild.

Chocolate Lily

Anthropodium strictum

The Chocolate Lily is native to woodlands and forest regions of Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, and Queensland. It produces purple flowers from spring to autumn that smell like chocolate when crushed. The flowers are edible and may be added to dishes as a garnish. Chocolate lilies were prized by Aboriginal peoples for their tubers, which can be eaten cooked or raw.

Information compiled by Mrs Victoria Coxhill (First Nations Engagement Coordinator – Senior School) with help from Year 11 students Kemi Odusanya, Oscar Pryor and Janice Li in consultation with Uncle Ivan-Tiwu Copley. Artwork by Uncle Ivan-Tiwu Copley.

