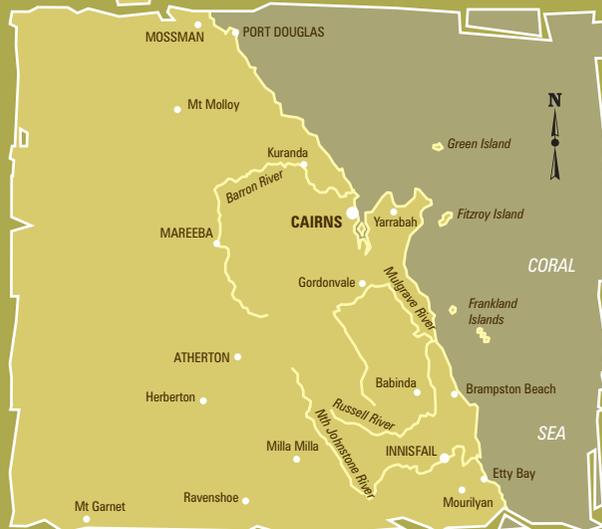


INTRODUCTION

Along this walk you will see some of the plants used by the various groups of Rainforest Aboriginals who lived in the Cairns to Mareeba area.



The main groupings of the Cairns region were:-
 DJABUGANYDJI. Kuranda to Mareeba area.
 GUNGGANYDJI. Yarrabah area.
 YIDINYDJI. Mulgrave River to Upper Barron River on Tablelands.
 YIRRGANYDJI. Barron River along the coast to Mowbray River.

(Please note there are no clearly defined boundaries between the different groups. Areas indicated are only to be used as an approximate guide).

ABORIGINALS, PLANTS & KNOWLEDGE

The Rainforest Aboriginals did not practice farming as we know it, although they used alternative techniques to improve their food gathering. For example they set fires in adjacent sclerophyll forest to induce fresh grass growth which in turn attracted animals that could be hunted.

They also used native Australian plants as a major source of food, shelter, medicine, clothing, utensils, tools and weapons, over a period dated in excess of 40,000 years. During this time they developed an extensive and detailed knowledge of the properties and uses of these plants.

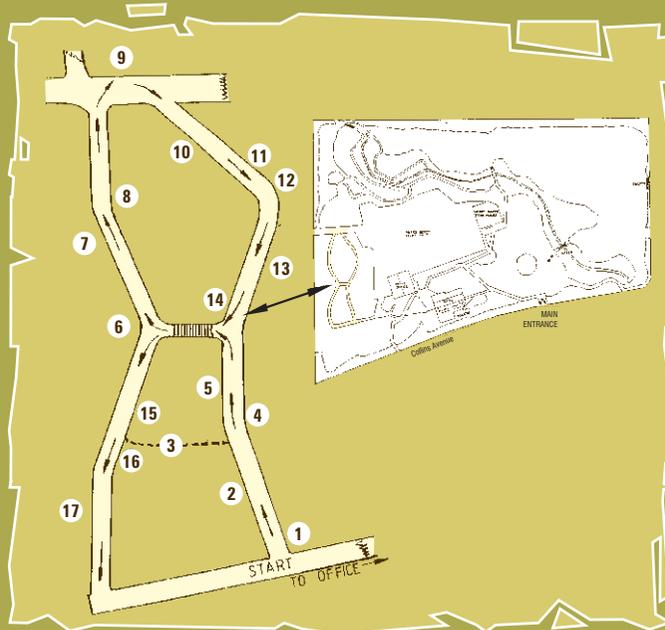
The forest was the source of life, a fact that we today are only beginning to relearn for ourselves.

Much of this knowledge has been lost due to the scattering of the various peoples and a movement away from traditional values and uses. Fortunately Aboriginal elders, scholars, historians and scientists are now working together in an effort to regain and record as much of this traditional lore as possible for the benefit of future generations.

FURTHER READING

The following publications are recommended to those persons wishing to obtain further information regarding the Rainforest Aboriginals and Aboriginal plant use.

- 'Words of our Country' compiled by RMW Dixon 1991 ISBN. 0 7022 2360 3.
- 'A Guide to Traditional Rainforest Plant Use' by the Kuku Yalanji of the Mossman Gorge 1995. ISBN. 0 646 229915
- 'Traditional Bush Medicines' (AN Aboriginal Pharmacopoeia) by Greenhouse Publication. 1988. ISBN. 0 86436 167 X
- 'Wild Food of Australia' AB&JW Cribb. 1974 ISBN. 0 00 211440 2.
- 'Bush Food' ABORIGINAL FOOD AND HERBAL MEDICINE by Jennifer Isaacs 1987. ISBN. 0 947116 90 7.

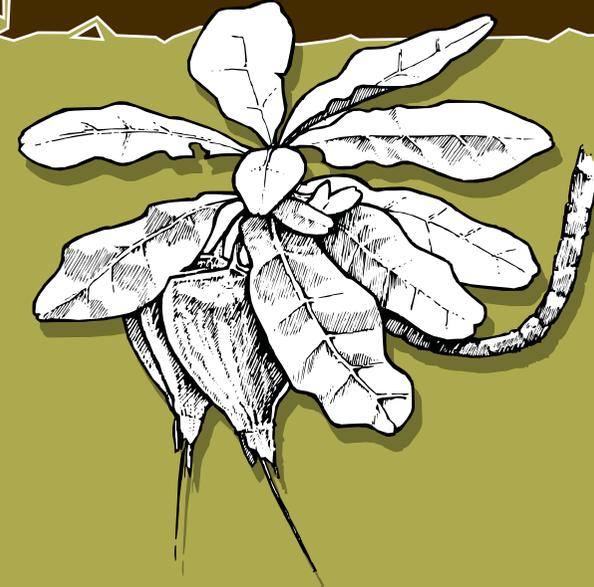


CAIRNS BOTANIC GARDENS

Collins Avenue, Edge Hill, Cairns, Queensland, Australia.
 Enquiries: Telephone 07 4044 3398

ABORIGINAL PLANT USE GARDEN

CAIRNS RAINFOREST REGION



Flecker Gardens Cairns Qld Australia

TOXIC PLANTS

Many species of Australian rainforest plants are edible, but a significant number are also extremely poisonous. Over the years the Aboriginal people learned to detoxify some of these plants to a level of safety.

The process of detoxification is often long and complicated, sometimes taking five or six days to complete. For example fruit from cycads was roasted, sliced, crushed and leached in running water to produce an edible flour which was then cooked and eaten.

*Aboriginal names give to the plants listed are from either the Yidin or Djabugay speaking peoples.

Other groups of aboriginals used the same plants but sometimes in completely different ways and for different purposes.

1. (Zamia Fern) *Bowenia spectabilis* STANGERIACEAE JAYUR Pron: JA-YOOR

These cycads are the smallest members of their family. They grow in the shelter of the rainforests and develop only one to three leaves. Because the plants are poisonous, the roots and the seeds were roasted, crushed and soaked for twenty-four hours, then roasted again in hot ashes before eating.



2. (Native Ginger) *Alpinia coerulea* ZINGIBERACEAE BARRGAL Pron: BURRAGULL

The leaves of this ginger were laid under or used to wrap meat when it was cooked in earth ovens. This imparted a spicy taste and protected the meat from the dirt.

The bright blue berries are edible and were often chewed and the seeds were spat out, resulting in a prolific number of plants growing along the walking trails. More importantly, the berries were also used as a bait to attract Scrub Turkeys into hooped net traps. The young tips of roots are also edible.

3. RAINFOREST DWELLING JIMURR/BAYU Pron: JIM-MOOR/BA-YOO

A simple yet highly efficient rainforest dwelling was constructed from a variety of native plant materials which were readily available in the rainforest.

An igloo-like frame was constructed of the more robust species of *Calamus* (Wait-a-Whiles) and bound with string manufactured by splitting the thin stems of *Calamus caryotoides* (Fishtail Wait-a-While).

The structure was then coated with grass, paperbark and palm fronds from (Wait-a-while) or *Licuala ramsayi* (Fan Palm). These dwellings were waterproof and well insulated against cold and heat. Small fires were tended at the entrance to keep the structure warm and dry as well as generating smoke to keep insects such as mosquitos away.



4. (Powder Puff Lilli-Pilli) *Syzygium wilsonii* MYRTACEAE No rainforest name recorded

The Powder Puff Lilli-Pilli is mostly known for its incredible, red powder puff flowers, however the people of the rain forests were more interested in its edible fruits. A wide range of *Syzygium* species provide edible and nourishing fruit, with colours that range from white to pink and purple.

5. (Zamia Palm) *Lepidozamia hopei* ZAMIACEAE WUNU Pron: (WOO-NOO)

These rainforest cycads reach heights of 20 metres. They are found in coastal rainforest in well shaded and moist conditions. As with other members of the cycads, the poisonous seeds were roasted, crushed and leached in water to render them edible.



6. (River Lily) *Crinum pedunculatum* AMARYLLIDACEAE No rainforest name recorded

These lilies are very common along tidal streams and river banks where they form dense margins that help trap silt and stabilize the banks. The leaves were crushed and rubbed on the body to relieve pain from the stings of marine jellyfish. The bulbs were crushed and boiled in water which was used as an antiseptic while the skins of the bulb were used as a dressing for wounds and leprosy.



7. (Palm Lily) *Cordyline manners-suttoniae* AGAVACEAE No rainforest name recorded

The Palm Lily gets its name from its palm-like growth and lily-like leaves. It thrives in the rainforest understorey and has attractive bright red berries. The Roots were dug up, leached and boiled before eating. An astringent juice was extracted from the roots and used as a contraceptive.



8. (Mat-Rush) *Lomandra longifolia* XANTHORROEACEAE JIRGUN Pron: (JEER-NOON)

Mat-rush is often found growing along water courses in the rainforest and was the primary source of material for string used to make Dilly bags and to weave baskets. The base of new leaves when eaten has a pleasant light nutty taste.

9. (Blue Quandong) *Elaeocarpus angustifolius* ELAEOCARPACEAE MURRGAN Pron: (MOO-REE-GUN)

Blue Quandongs are large rainforest trees that are made conspicuous by their old leaves which are bright red. The fruits are a vivid blue with edible flesh and kernels. The fruits must be very soft before they can be eaten and they sometimes have an astringent taste. The seeds are best propagated after passing through an animal digestive tract. They are relished by pigeons, cassowaries, fruit bats and other birds and animals.

10. (Fish Poison Tree) *Barringtonia asiatica* LECYTHIDACEAE No rainforest name recorded

This is a large tree found along the beaches and coastal rivers. It has large pom-pom like flowers that bloom in the night and fall to the ground by the middle of the next day. The young nuts and green growth were crushed and placed in water to kill fish. Although the plant is extremely poisonous, it kills fish by removing oxygen from the water.



11. (Cedar Bay Cherry) *Eugenia reinwardtiana* MYRTACEAE No rainforest name recorded

The red ovoid fruits of this rainforest shrub were relished by the aboriginal people as they are both edible and sweet.

12. (Corkwood) *Carallia brachiata* RHIZOPHORACEAE MARRADA/MARATTA Pron: (MAR-RADA/MA-RAT-RA)

This is the only non-mangrove species of the *Rhizophoraceae* family in Australia. The small red globular fruits ripen in November in large numbers and are eagerly sought for their sweet flavour. The hard wood of the tree was used for a variety of domestic purposes such as canoes, weapons and music sticks.

13. (Solitaire Palm) *Ptychosperma elegans* AREACEAE No rainforest name recorded

The edible heart of these and other tall rainforest palms were eaten raw or cooked. The wood of some palms such as the *Normanbya normanbyi* (Black Palm) and the *Calamus* species (Wait-a-Whiles), were used for construction purposes, music sticks and weapons. The leaf sheaths of the common *Archontophoenix alexandrae* (Alexander palms) were used as carry containers and water buckets. The fruits of many palm species are edible.

14. (Native Cardamom) *Hornstedtia scottiana* ZINGIBERACEAE JAGIN/MUNYIN Pron: (JUG-KIN/MOO-NEEN)

A relative of the common spice cardamom, this plant grows in colonies in moist rainforests. The stems can be more than 3 metres tall. The edible fleshy, multiple fruits form a cone about 4cm long at ground level and are relished for their sweet flesh. The numerous small black seeds are edible with a gingery flavour, but they were mostly spat out as they can cause constipation.



15. (Fishtail Lawyer Cane) *Calamus caryotoides* AREACEAE BUGUL Pron: (BOOK-KOOL)

The thin flexible trunks of this and other climbing palms made ideal building frames or ropes and string when split. The young shoots were eaten to cure headaches. A close relative is the infamous *Calamus radialis* (Wait-a-While) (WUNBU) which entangles unwary passers by with recurved hooks attached to long thin flagella. The young growing tips of these were chewed and swallowed to stop dysentery and the sap was taken as a drink to relieve symptoms of colds and flu.



16. (Screw Pine) *Pandanus gemmifer* PANDANACEAE YAGAL (All species) Pron: (YUK-KAL)

These interesting plants are called screw pines because the leaf insertion pattern resembles the thread of a screw. No male of this species has ever been found and they reproduce only from plantlets which form on the stems, then drop off to develop into new plants. The leaves were used to make Dilly (string) bags, sieve bags, mats, armbands and baskets.



17. (Native Banana) *Musa banksii* MUSACEAE JADAM/YUMUN Pron: (JUN-DUM/YOO-MOON)

Native bananas grow in clumps and reach heights of approximately 5 metres. The thin yellow fruits are edible but so full of small angular black seeds that there is very little flesh. The leaves were used to wrap food when cooking to keep it clear of dirt and ashes as well as keeping it moist.