Bush Food Plants of the South East
Caution: Some plants are poisonous and extreme care must be taken. Do not eat bush food plants without being shown by an experienced person.

Natural Resources South East acknowledges and respects the traditional owners of the ancestral lands of the South East. We acknowledge elders past and present and we respect the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of Aboriginal peoples to country. Acknowledgements to Neville Bonney for his contribution and assistance in compiling this publication, Des Hartman for his assistance regarding Aboriginal language. Images courtesy of Neville Bonney, Kathy Bell, Bryan Haywood, Elizabeth Mapletoft, Tina Fowler, Oisin Sweeney, Steve Clarke, Rebecka McCann, Peter Tucker.

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KEENG-A (BUNGANDITJ) PLANT
PUUYUUP (BUNGANDITJ) FRUIT

Native Pigface
Carpobrotus rossii
PREPARATION AND USE
Fleshy fruits were eaten raw when ripe (pinkish red colour). Green leaves also eaten raw or cooked and eaten with meat. Leaves often have a salty flavour. Skin peeled off before eating.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Predominantly coastal.

FLOWERING TIME
August - October.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Low spreading plant, spreading out to many meters. Thick fleshy triangular leaves. Daisy like flower heads, mostly pink to mauve in colour up to 5.5cm in diameter. Fruits, purplish to red.

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MUNTER, NGURP (BUNGANDITJ)

Muntries

Kunzea pomifera
PREPARATION AND USE
Berries eaten fresh or pounded together to make a paste, which was dried and eaten later. Ripe fruits have a dry apple, peach taste.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Usually on sandy soil, often with limestone.

FLOWERING TIME
October - December.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Prostrate shrub with spreading branches up to many meters. Leaves oval to round up to 5mm in length. Small white flowers. Fruits globular green, ripening to a reddish purple in colour.

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KUNDUWI  (BUNGANDITJ)  
(NGARRINDJERI)

**Sweet Apple-berry**

*Billardiera cymosa ssp. cymosa*
PREPARATION AND USE
Ripe fruit regarded as one of the tastiest bush fruits with an aniseed flavour.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Widespread in most parts of the region.

FLOWERING TIME
Mainly November - January.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Shrub or climber to 1m high. Leaves narrow to oblong 2-6cm long. Flowers 5 petaled, creamy-white to purple in colour. Fruits oblong, often reddish in colour up to 3cm long.

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FAMILY
Pittosporaceae

SCIENTIFIC NAME
Billardiera cymosa
ssp. cymosa

COMMON NAME
Sweet Apple-berry

ABORIGINAL NAME
Kunduwi (Bunganditj) (Ngarrindjeri)
KARRA (BUNGANDITJ)

Black Wattle

Acacia mearnsii
PREPARATION AND USE
Important source of gum, which was chewed. Balls of gum were kept and carried about, eaten or dissolved in water with flower nectar to make sweet drinks.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Occurs in the lower South East region from Naracoorte southwards in woodland, open forest and tussock grassland.

FLOWERING TIME
September - November.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Small spreading tree, 5-12 m high. Dark, rough bark on the trunk, dark green, soft phyllodes. Pale yellow to cream flowers. Brown seed pods 5-10cm long with small black seeds.

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NAL-A-WORT (BUNGANDITJ)

Golden Wattle

Acacia pycnantha
PREPARATION AND USE
The gum was eaten or mixed with water and nectar from flowers to make sweet drinks. When mature, seeds were ground to a flour and mixed with water to make a paste. Seeds offer a high source of carbohydrate, protein and fibre.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Occurs throughout the region on a variety of soils.

FLOWERING TIME
August - October.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Medium shrub or small tree 3-8m high. Phyllodes broad, wide at the centre and tapering towards the base, 6-20cm long by 1-5cm wide. Flowers golden yellow balls branched in clusters.

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PEEINTUCK (BUNGANDITJ) (NGARRINDJERI)

Black-anther Flax-lily

*Dianella revoluta var. revoluta.*
PREPARATION AND USE
Plant has medicinal uses. The juice of the berries were known to fight colds. The underground stems where cleaned and chewed, good for colds also. Some species of Dianella have poisonous berries.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Very common and widespread, especially in wetter areas.

FLOWERING TIME
September - January.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Small, clumping lily, to 1m high. Leaves with rolled back leaf edges. Flowers have blue petals, blank anthers with yellow base. Small oval, purple-blue fleshy fruits.

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BO-AN (BUNGANDITJ) EDIBLE ROOT

Common Vanilla-lily

Arthropodium strictum
PREPARATION AND USE
Tubers can be dug up once they have developed near the base of the plant. Tubers were eaten raw but usually roasted first. High in carbohydrates and sweet tasting.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Common throughout the region.

FLOWERING TIME
Mainly September - December.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Small, erect annual to 1m high. Grass-like leaves. Flowers purple to 2cm in diameter. Fruit, globular capsule.

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TAARUK, TAROOK (GUNDITJMARA)

Old Man’s Beard

*Clematis microphylla*
PREPARATION AND USE
Long fibrous roots were dug up and cooked in, and over, hot coals, then kneaded into a dough. When not cooked, the young roots often taste peppery. Very high in starch.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Widespread in the region but particularly common along the coast.

FLOWERING TIME
July - September.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
A scrambling vine or climber with long slender stems. Leaves consist of three leaflets 1-3 cm long. Many flowers, cream-white in colour. Seed, feathery-fluffy in appearance.

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FAMILY
Ranunculaceae

SCIENTIFIC NAME
Clematis microphylla

COMMON NAME
Old Man’s Beard

ABORIGINAL NAME
Taaruk, Tarook
(Gunditjmara)
Narrow-leaf Bulrush
*Typha domingensis*
PREPARATION AND USE
The new shoots and the underground stems were both eaten and have a potato like taste. The roots were usually cooked and roasted, then chewed. The fibre remaining after the root was chewed and the starch removed, was twisted and made into string. The new shoots were eaten raw as a salad. A very important plant.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Grows on the edges of wetlands and permanent lakes and swamps.

FLOWERING TIME
Throughout the year.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Tall, aquatic plant to 2m high. Leaves, long, narrow, 0.5-1cm wide. Flowers, cylindrical spikes, light brown, 10-25cm long by 0.5-1.5cm diameter.

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BO-AN (BUNGANDITJ) EDIBLE ROOT
POPOTO (GUNDITJMARA)

Milkmaids
*Burchardia umbellata*
PREPARATION AND USE
After flowers died off, tubers were dug up and cooked before eating. Crisp, highly nutritious tubers that look like small carrots.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Grows in grassland, open woodland and scrub heathlands.

FLOWERING TIME
July - October.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Small, erect, single-stemmed annual, 15-50cm high. 2-3 long, linear leaves to 25cm which occur from the base. Flowers white with 6 petals.

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FAMILY
Liliaceae

SCIENTIFIC NAME
Burchardia umbellata

COMMON NAME
Milkmaids

ABORIGINAL NAME
Bo-An (Bunganditj)
Edible root
Popoto (Gunditjmara)

EDIBLE ROOT

Caution: Some plants are poisonous and extreme care must be taken. Do not eat bush food plants without being shown by an experienced person.
ME-A-KEE (BUNGANDITJ)
MOOKITCH (GUNDITJMARÁ)

Kangaroo Apple
Solanum laciniatum
PREPARATION AND USE
Collected and fruits eaten only when soft and ripe.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
A scattered plant in the South East, usually confined to coastal areas.

FLOWERING TIME
September - March.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
A medium to tall, open, sometimes straggly plant. Leaves to 20cm long. Flowers purple with 5 petals, yellow stamens. Fruit globular shape, start out green then change colour, yellow through to orange when ripening.

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FAMILY
Solanaceae

SCIENTIFIC NAME
Solanum laciniatum

COMMON NAME
Kangaroo Apple

ABORIGINAL NAME
Me-a-kee (Bunganditj)
Mookitch (Gunditjmara)
NGOOR-LE (BUNGANDITJ)

Coast Beard-heath

Leucopogon parviflorus
PREPARATION AND USE
No cooking required, eaten as a ripe fruit.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Common in coastal and near coastal eucalypt woodlands, open scrub and heathlands on sand dunes over limestone or granite.

FLOWERING TIME
Most of the year; fruit: September - February.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Erect, pale to bright green shrub, 1-2m high. Leaves with pointed tip, dark green above, pale green below, 1-3cm long by 4-8mm wide. Flowers white, small, 5 petalled in clusters. Fruit globular, small, white and fleshy.

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WROIT (BUNGANDITJ)

Silver Banksia

* Banksia marginata
PREPARATION AND USE
Flower spikes soaked in water to release plant nectar. A sweet drink sometimes mixed with the gum from Golden Wattle and Black Wattle.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Sandy to clay soils in heath, woodlands and forest.

FLOWERING TIME
All year.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Low shrub or small tree. Leaves stiff, green above, white below, 2-8cm long by 3-8mm wide. Flowers yellow, cylindrical spikes, 5-10cm long by 4cm wide. Fruit woody cylindrical cone, black triangular seed enclosed.

Caution: Some plants are poisonous and extreme care must be taken. Do not eat bush food plants without being shown by an experienced person.

FAMILY
Proteaceae

SCIENTIFIC NAME
Banksia marginata

COMMON NAME
Silver Banksia

ABORIGINAL NAME
Wroit (Bunganditj)

MURNONG (GENERAL)
MUURANG, KEERANG
(GUNDITJMARA)

Yam-daisy
*Microseris lanceolata*
PREPARATION AND USE
Tubers dug up and usually cooked in baskets in earth ovens, allowed to cook slowly. Very common plant before European settlement.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
In mallee, swamps, woodland and other open vegetation.

FLOWERING TIME
July - October.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Perennial herb, 10-40cm high. Leaves narrow, arising from the base of the plant, 30cm long. Flowers singular, yellow, daisy-like.

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FAMILY
Compositae

SCIENTIFIC NAME
Microseris lanceolata

COMMON NAME
Yam-daisy

ABORIGINAL NAME
Murnong (general)
Muurang, Keerang (Gunditjmara)
TAARK (GUNDITJMARA)
CHARR-AK (GUNDITJMARA)
EDIBLE ROOT

Common Reed
Phragmites australis
PREPARATION AND USE
Underground shoots were eaten tasting like bamboo shoots. The long, straight flowering stems were used for spear shafts.

PLANT DISTRIBUTION
Grows in wet places, especially along the banks of rivers and ponds.

FLOWERING TIME
December - August.

PLANT DESCRIPTION
Tall, erect reed, 1-3m high. Narrow, tapering leaves 20-50cm long by 1-5cm wide. Flowers fluffy white to pale brown, 10-40cm long.

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FAMILY
Gramineae

SCIENTIFIC NAME
Phragmites australis

COMMON NAME
Common Reed

ABORIGINAL NAME
Taark (Gunditjamara)
Charr-ak (Gunditjamara)
edible root