



"I WANT TO SHOWCASE WHAT GROWS ON THIS BIG, BEAUTIFUL ISLAND OF OURS ... AND HOW TO USE IT IN EVERYDAY COOKING, NOT JUST FANCY RESTAURANTS."

—NORНИ BERО

HELP YOURSELF

From quandongs to Kakadu plums, indigenous ingredients are becoming easier to find, giving meals a flavoursome burst, nutritious boost and connection to tradition and land

WORDS: PATRICIA MAUNDER

You might have tried some of Australia's native foods. Crunchy, creamy macadamia nuts. Finger limes with their piquant pulp. Lemon myrtle in herbal tea, tickling the tastebuds with its citrusy tang.

There are about 6000 recorded types of native Australian foods. But most of what we often call "bush tucker" has long been regarded as a novelty or restaurant luxury.

Now, however, that's starting to change. Plants and animals that have sustained Australia's Indigenous people for tens of thousands of years are being more widely embraced, not just for their unique, exciting flavours, but also their nutritional value and sustainability.

NATURALLY NUTRITIOUS

Dietitian Natasha Schilling says research shows that native Australian ingredients are "great sources of different vitamins and minerals".

Some are particularly rich sources, such as the Kakadu plum, which has "100 times more vitamin C than an orange", despite being much smaller.

The Dietitians Australia spokeswoman was based in the Northern Territory for 16 years until recently. It was there, from Alice Springs to the Tiwi Islands, that her eyes were opened to the traditional foods of her mostly Aboriginal clients and she experienced foraging for bush foods under the guidance of local women. She notes a lot of bush foods are

quite brightly coloured, from green Kakadu plums and orange bush passionfruit to red quandongs and rosella plants.

Natasha explains that with any fruits and vegetables, the brighter the colour, the more antioxidants and phytonutrients they have.

Furthermore, a range of colours delivers a variety of nutritional benefits, which is why dietitians suggest "eating a rainbow".

Other native foods Natasha singles out for praise include kangaroo meat — "it's very lean and a good source of iron" — and lemon myrtle for its "strong anti-fungal properties".

She also recommends lemon myrtle as a plant-based source of calcium and for lutein, "which is really important for eye health".

On hot days, you might like to swap out your hot lemon myrtle tea for iced tea. As Natasha discovered in the Northern Territory, "it's a beautiful, refreshing drink".

RELISSING THE FLAVOURS

Championing the tastes of native flavours in everyday cooking is chef Nornie Bero (pictured left), whose first cookbook, *Mabu Mabu*, is out now.

"I want to showcase what grows on this big, beautiful island of ours ... and how to use it in everyday cooking, not just fancy restaurants," Nornie says.

"*Mabu mabu*" means "help yourself" in Nornie's homeland, the Torres Strait Islands, and is also the name of her Melbourne business, which includes two restaurants (Big Esso and Tuck Shop) and pantry items.

Ingredients that Nornie grew up hunting and foraging for, and now uses liberally in cooking, include sea succulents such as karkalla, samphire and sea spray. Alongside another favourite, saltbush, they impart a natural salty flavour to dishes, "so you don't have to add any salt".

Some of Australia's many native species of hibiscus flowers, which Nornie remembers adorning her nan's hair, feature in her desserts and tea. Another *Mabu Mabu*

hero ingredient is warrigal greens, which Nornie likens to spinach. The green, leafy vegetable is high in fibre, vitamin C and healthy antioxidants.

"It's tasty and grows like wildfire, so why don't we have it in supermarkets?" Nornie asks. "In cities, especially, you tend to get what you're given ... but it's becoming more apparent people want to branch out and have things that naturally grow in their parts of Australia."

GROW YOUR OWN

Natasha suggests growing bush foods at home and using them in everyday cooking.

"They're suited to our climate, so they grow beautifully," she points out.

Given the right conditions, warrigal greens, for example, which grow wild on Australia's east coast, are easy to grow in vegie patches and pots. Nornie says if you grow what's natural for your area, "it's always going to be better, because it belongs there. It's healthy and it's good for our land".

To find bush tucker plants, visit garden nurseries and look at Australian plant websites such as tuckerbush.com.au.

WHERE TO FIND NATIVE INGREDIENTS

If growing your own bush tucker plants doesn't appeal, seek out native ingredients at quality greengrocers, specialty food stores, online shops and supermarkets, where native produce and products with Australian ingredients are becoming more common.

"It's getting a lot easier and more mainstream to include native ingredients as part of everyday life," Natasha says.

She encourages shoppers to look for bush-food products from businesses that are owned by and employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, because they "hold the traditional knowledge that will be passed down the generations".

"There is so much wonderful knowledge out there," she says.



Try these
WATTLESEED SCONES
Makes 12-14 scones

"When I was young, the oldies would spend the whole day yarning, and they couldn't go very long without a fresh cup of tea. It was the youngster's job to be constantly making cups of tea — and you better make it right! Even though it was just plain old black tea, it had to be made perfectly. While the adults would often eat Scotch Finger or Monte Carlo biscuits dunked in their brew, I would have been crowned best kid if I'd served some of these wattleseed scones. Yum, get in my belly! Wattleseed is great for baking and has that beautiful nutty flavour and cocoa colour that works so well in these simple scones."

— NORНИ BERО

INGREDIENTS

- 450g self-raising flour, plus extra for dusting
- 100g butter, at room temperature
- 375ml milk, or nut milk
- 1 tbsp ground wattleseed*

Preheat the oven to 180C and dust a baking tray with flour. Mix the flour and butter in a bowl until well combined. Add the milk and wattleseed and mix with the flour and butter to make a sticky dough. Dust a clean work surface with some flour and knead the dough until it is soft in texture, being careful not to overwork it. With a rolling pin, roll out the dough to a 5cm thickness. Use a round biscuit cutter to cut out scones. (If you don't have a cutter, use a measuring cup or thin glass, such as a wine glass.) Place on the tray and bake for 20-25 minutes. Serve with cream and jam.



and this
WATTLESEED BANANA BREAD
Makes 1 loaf Serves 8-10

"Banana trees are always growing in our back yards up north, so the banana is a big staple. This is a great way to use up all your ripe bananas, and the delicious cinnamon myrtle and pepperberry show how easy it is to use native produce in your everyday cooking."

— NORНИ BERО

INGREDIENTS

- 140g brown sugar
- 250g plain flour
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon myrtle*
- ½ tsp ground or freshly grated nutmeg
- ½ tsp ground pepperberry*
- 1 tbsp ground wattleseed*
- 150g whole macadamia nuts
- 5 ripe bananas
- 2 large eggs
- 125g butter, melted and cooled, plus extra for greasing
- 1 tbsp vanilla extract
- 125ml vegetable oil

Preheat the oven to 180C. Lightly grease an 11cm x 21cm loaf tin, and line the base and two sides with baking paper. Sift all the dry ingredients into a bowl and add the macadamia nuts. In a separate bowl, mash four of the bananas and mix in the eggs, butter, vanilla extract and oil. Fold the dry ingredients into the wet mix until well combined. Spoon the mixture into the prepared loaf tin. Slice the fifth banana and place the slices on top of the mixture. Bake for 50-60 minutes. To check if the bread is cooked, insert a cake skewer in the centre — the skewer should come out clean. Let the bread sit in the tin for 5 minutes, then turn it out onto a wire rack.



Images and edited extract and recipes from *Mabu Mabu* by Nornie Bero, published by Hardie Grant Books, RRP \$45. Photography: Armelle Habib.

'Available from specialty food stores, such as mabumabu.com.au