

Plants for the water friendly garden



Clarence... a brighter place



Native plant
field guide

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Key: Plant use

Fibre	
Bush tucker	
Medicinal	
Dye	

Interrelationships with fauna

Birds		Insects	
Moths		Bees	
Butterflies		Ants	
Marsupials			

Watering

	Low
	Low/Mod
	Moderate

This booklet provides an interesting insight into a selection of local native plants growing in Clarence, many of which can be found at the Rosny Historic Centre's 'Water Friendly Garden'.

These plants were selected as representatives of the many species found in the surrounding dry grassy woodlands that would have been used by local aboriginal tribes or early colonial settlers. Many of these plants have a close relationship with the local fauna such as butterflies, ants, honey eaters, lizards and bandicoots.

The description of each plant reveals a number of intriguing attributes relating to its use as bush tucker; medicinal properties, fibre and dye production, as well as its role in providing habitat for native fauna.

Most of these plants are easy to grow in your home garden, and from late winter through to early summer will display a range of attractive flowers.

Since most of the plants described have adapted to survive during the dry summer and autumn periods by dying down into underground tubers, they assist in minimising water use in the garden.

Safety

Please remember that tasting any bush tucker plant in your garden or in the bush should only be considered if the taster has total confidence in identifying the plant and that the plant is safe to eat or use.

Further information

Infosheets containing detailed descriptions of each of these plants are available from Clarence City Council - 38 Bligh Street, Rosny Park or the Rosny Historic Centre - Access via the car park at Rosny Park Public Golf Course. A companion guide, *Popular walks in Clarence* is also available from Clarence City Council.

City of Clarence web site www.ccc.tas.gov.au



This sprawling ground cover displays tubular green flowers, which provide a rich source of nectar for native bees, ants and other insects.

Also known as 'honey-pots' by aborigines, these flowers can be steeped in water to produce a sweet thirst quenching drink.

By autumn, small, apple-like green berries replace the flowers, which like most edible native fruits are slightly tart and non-sweet. Native birds feast on these berries, thus transporting its seeds to favourable germination sites. Once established this

hardy, low, compact shrub withstands extended dry periods without supplementary watering.



This drought-tolerant bright yellow ever-lasting beauty is ideal for a splash of colour in the native garden.

During spring and summer, small mottled brown and yellow butterflies (the White Grassdart) with a low whirring flight pattern, hover erratically over the flower heads. These butterflies feed on nectar from the hundreds of tiny flowers, which comprise the button-like flower heads. The flowers are then cross-pollinated from pollen attached to the butterflies, which lay their domed eggs at the base of nearby native grasses. Their pale green caterpillars join leaves together to form shelters. Billy Buttons die back into bulbous storage roots by late summer. These can be dug up and harvested for a crisp nutty-flavoured snack.





The fast growing, drought tolerant, Black Wattle stands proud amongst other woodland trees due to the exceptional range of food and habitat values.

The roots form a symbiotic relationship with fungi, which produce delicious truffles for bettongs, bandicoots and potoroos. Black cockatoos strip its outer bark in search of insects and grubs. The lighter coloured sap that oozes from damaged trunks was a prized drink for aborigines when dissolved in water with sweet wattle flower nectar. Early Sydney confectioners used it as a base for chewing gum.

Aborigines also mixed the darker coloured sap with fine ash to plug holes in water carrying vessels and bark canoes.



This Saltbush is very tolerant of exposed coastal conditions including highly saline and droughty soils.

Its extensive root systems are excellent for binding erosion-prone sandy soils.

The lush, fire resistant, silvery-grey foliage makes it ideal as a feature plant in the home garden. The leaves can be cooked as a spinach substitute whilst the hard seeds derived from the fleshy fruits can be ground into flour.

Annual pruning will enhance the plant's amenity and bush tucker attributes.



Curling Everlasting *Helichrysum scorpioides*

Plants for the water friendly garden



This water friendly spreading herb has yellow, papery daisies during the spring and summer.

It enhances the native garden or a dried flower arrangement by providing long lasting colour.

It is best grown in small clumps or individually between the tussocks of established native grasses.

During summer it attracts small mottled brown and yellow butterflies (the White Grassdart) to the garden. These feed on the small pools of nectar supplied by the individual florets making up the composite flower heads.

Like the Billy Buttons it dies back to fleshy edible storage roots by late summer.



This small hardy shrub is adorned in spring with butterfly attracting white blooms. Each long tubular flower extends its pollen-laden anthers to the abdomens of unsuspecting butterflies. This serves the plant's cross-pollination needs, in return for supplying the butterflies, such as the Hobart Brown butterfly with reservoirs of sweet nectar. The term 'Bushman's Bootlace' is applied to many *Pimelea* species, since they have proved to be an excellent bootlace substitute. Aborigines extracted the plant's fibre by soaking and then beating its stems. The resulting fibre was rolled along their thighs with open hands to spin the finest of natural threads, which were used for net making.





The botanical name **Dianella** derives from the name of the **Greek Goddess of the hunt**, whilst **revoluta** refers to the **revolved (curved back to the underside of the leaf) margins of the strap-like leaves**.

This water friendly tuft forming lily displays arching sprays of blue flowers in spring, followed by small purple fruits. Foraging native birds aid in transporting the seed after consuming the fruits. Home gardens benefit from their distinctive form when planted in drifts or used as an attractive accent plant.

Aborigines split and rolled the leaves to form a coarse string, which was woven into dillies and baskets. They also ate the slightly tart, berry-like fruits.



This small shrub is one of a number of attractive bush peas, which are ideal for water-friendly native gardens.

As with other bush peas, their small golden pea-shaped flowers display distinctive striped patterning (nectar guides) designed to attract native bees such as the solitary Mason and Carpenter bees. In return for the pollen and nectar these bees provide a pollination service. The exotic honeybees are too large to pollinate these small bush peas. Instead they service the larger sized pea-flowering weeds such as Gorse and Brooms and the many exotic garden peas such as Beans and Wisteria. All these bush peas have little white root nodules, which contain nitrogen collecting rhizobium bacteria. They play an important role in fertilising the bush soil.





When seen in the bush the spectacular grass skirt of the Grass Tree imparts a unique Australian sense of place.

Bush tucker is provided from the white, tender sections of its leaf bases, its succulent roots and the growing points of the stem. However, removing the growing point destroys the plant.

The seeds can be ground into flour for a damper. Edible grubs could be dug out from the base of their trunks.

The central shaft was used for Aboriginal spears and the straight flower stalks formed a drilling stick for making fire.

The leaves produce a hard waterproof resin, ideal waterproofing for bark canoes and as a glue.



This distinctive, water friendly, woodland understorey plant becomes attractive during spring, when it is adorned with pretty yellow, buttercup-like flowers.

As an easily grown garden or container plant, it enhances any garden display either as an individual specimen or grouped as a drift amid native grasses and tussocks.

These small shrubs should be regularly tip pruned to form long lasting, compact bushes. Since the flowers produce nectar, which is rich in protein and fat, it attracts foraging native bees seeking food to develop their young.

This nectar is stored within earthen cells where the bees lay their eggs.





This drought-tolerant, small tree is characterised by yellow, bottlebrush flowers and older seed-bearing cones.

The flowers produce copious nectar and pollen, which can be extracted by soaking in water to form a sweet drink.

The colonists made lanterns from the old cones by soaking them in wax and spiking them on sticks.

The native carpenter bee bores into the softer Banksia wood and constructs a series of honey filled cells each containing one of her eggs. They are then sealed using a plug of wooden frass and gum, providing a safe nesting haven.



As a member of the Potato and Tomato family this rapid growing drought tolerant shrub displays distinctive potato-like blue flowers with yellow anthers.

Its prolific lush foliage can be harvested repeatedly for supplies of easily decomposable leaves for the compost heap.

By late summer, its green cherry-sized fruits ripen to form a bush tucker similar to a small yellow tomato, ideal for making relish.

To ensure the potentially toxic fruit was edible Aborigines buried piles of these fruits in mounds of sand for softening. When they turned deep reddish orange they were ready to eat.





Like all native grasses, a mass planting of Kangaroo Grass provides an attractive water friendly replacement for water demanding lawns.

Grasslands dominated by Kangaroo Grass were an integral part of the aboriginal hunting and gathering life style. Following patch burning, the fresh new 'green pick' attracted large mobs of kangaroos to aid aboriginal hunting. Many Kangaroo Grass grasslands have now been degraded by weedy Spear Grasses as a result of too frequent and intensive burning by pastoralists.

Aborigines regularly used it for food and fibre. The seeds were ground into flour and used to make a damper, whilst the sweet stem bases were eaten like sugar cane.

Aboriginal women rolled the stems and leaves along their thighs to form a fine thread.



During spring, this attractive lily develops a tall spike of yellow flowers amongst its leek-like foliage. Since these flowers persist for a few weeks they can be grown as formal bedding displays or allowed to form naturalised drifts within a cottage garden setting.

The Leek Lily's water friendly nature derives from its ability to exist as an underground storage organ during the dry summer and autumn periods.

As a bush tucker source, its tender shoots can be eaten as greens.

The succulent roots are edible once the leaves have died back.





This water-friendly strap-leaved sedge provides pea-like flavoured bush tucker from its tender white leaf bases.

The Sagg provides a habitat for the caterpillars of the White-spot Skipper butterfly. They feed on its fleshy leaf bases and join together a few leaves for a shelter before pupating.

Aboriginal women wove the dampened split leaves into baskets (dillies). These were used for collecting bush tucker, shellfish and crayfish. Their nectar-laden spring flowers could be steeped in water for a sweet drink.

By late summer the flowers form clusters of small brown nutlets, which could be harvested and ground into flour.



These small herbaceous groundcovers produce delicate flowers, which persist during spring and early summer.

Being adapted to long dry periods, by dying back to underground rootstocks, they can respond rapidly to a soaking rain. Within a few weeks they sprout green leaves followed by a display of blue flowers.

Interestingly, flowers were harvested and eaten by aborigines. Blue bell petals can be used as an attractive edible garnish on green salads.





This sprawling, drought tolerant groundcover is from the Rose family and displays the glossy divided leaves typically seen on roses.

Its botanical name *Acaena* is Greek for 'thorn', which refers to their distinctive burr-like seed heads that stick to anything that touches it. Along with the fur of our native marsupials, many unsuspecting bush walkers inadvertently contribute to the seeds' dispersal by discarding the balled seed clusters after disentangling them from their socks.

The young succulent leaves, once dried, produce a refreshing tea. Remember, only the 'tiny tips' will make this a worthy teatime treat!



Few native plants have all the garden attributes which this long-flowering, water-loving, herbaceous Native Geranium possesses. It rapidly establishes itself from seeds or cuttings in the poorest of soils, forming a low cover of soft green foliage and a continuous flush of delightful geranium-like flowers.

The mauve, cup shaped flowers have reddish stripes known as beelines, which attract bees. The bees use their long proboscis to suck from their nectaries, whilst providing a pollination service for the flower.

The word Geranium derives from 'Geranos', Latin for crane, relating to the distinctive crane bill shape of their fruits.

Aborigines roasted their bulbous roots and extracted the flesh with its tannin-like active ingredient, in order to treat diarrhoea.





The Hop Bush is a water friendly, environmentally tolerant shrub that thrives in our grassy woodlands.

Its name derives from the use of the attractive reddish–brown seed capsules as an alternative to hops.

Interestingly it is also known by the Aborigines as the 'Oyster Bush' as its flowering time coincided with the best time for aboriginal women to dive off the rocky foreshores in order to harvest plump oysters.

Surprisingly, it is found in abundance across many countries including North and South America. It was valued as a traditional medicinal plant by both the American Indians and the Aborigines. Both cultures made

tinctures from their roots to treat cuts and wounds.



The delicate fern-like, blue-green leaves and showy spring display of pink to lilac flowers ensure this water-friendly shrub is considered for a native garden. Colonists made an effective dye from infusing the leaves and flowers. However the indigo dye extracted from its brother *Indigofera tinctoria* is world-renowned. The leaves also contain low levels of an active ingredient, which restricts them from being browsed by kangaroos and wallabies.





This spreading ground cover exhibits a carpet of purple flowers in spring.

This feature along with its succulent leaves and outstanding resilience to drought begs its inclusion in any native garden.

It forms one of Australia's tastiest wild fruits, best described as a blend between a strawberry and a fig. During lean times in late summer, Aborigines would locate their camps near drifts of Pigface to guarantee a food source. Their fleshy leaves can also be cooked as greens or squeezed to provide soothing juices for bites and burns. Its sand and soil binding abilities makes it an ideal natural erosion control for exposed soils.



The Native Primrose is characterised by its long flowering period and persistence in harsh environmental conditions.

Consequently it often grows amongst the early pioneering plants that quickly germinate and provide protective soil covering, following disturbances such as fire or land clearing.

Its dainty yellow, pea shaped flowers attract native bees and provides nectar in exchange for pollination services. Close inspection of the flowers reveals line markings that act as nectar guides for foraging bees.

Interestingly, by 1793, it had been recorded as one of the first Tasmanian plants to flourish in English gardens and its leaves were valued for their ability to treat diabetic ailments.





With its salt and wind tolerance and glossy attractive succulent green leaves this groundcover is an ideal addition to any native garden.

By the 1820's the French were regularly harvesting it from their vegetable gardens, making it one of the earliest bush tucker exports from Australia.

Captain Joseph Banks introduced it to the English, who still enjoy it today as a pleasant spinach substitute, ideal for stir-fries.

In late summer it produces succulent edible red fruit, which can also be used as a dye. It spreads rapidly making it an ideal pioneer plant for dry disturbed sites.



The masses of eggs and bacon coloured flowers adorning this water-friendly bush pea during spring makes it an ideal native garden addition.

Besides its ability to attract native bees, it hosts the caterpillars of the small brown Fringed Blue butterfly. They feed on the bush pea's flower buds, whilst maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with the little black, strong smelling ants (*Iridomyrmex* sp.). The ants herd the caterpillars much like dairy cows, protecting them from predators. In return, they are supplied with nutritious honeydew excreted by the caterpillar. The ants also collect and store the seeds for a winter food supply.

This is a good example of a mutually beneficial relationship, which is common within our grassy woodlands.





This water friendly prostrate groundcover displays beautiful red pea flowers along its many creeping stems.

These long fibrous stems have been valuable for making twine. During early spring mornings it produces very high nectar flows relative to other native plants.

This attracts the early morning foraging native bees, enabling pollination of the flowers whilst supplying nectar for the breeding bees.

This high nectar content in the flowers can be extracted by soaking them to brew a sweet

drink. The brightly coloured flowers provide a colourful garnish to salads whilst the dried young leaves or tiny tips provide a pleasant tea.



Velleia is a dainty water friendly small herb that is recommended to gardeners who treasure rare floral delights. Its rarity and attractive yellow flowers have earned it the role of floral emblem for Waverley Flora Park, which is the premier bushland reserve in Clarence. In order to ensure that the small population survives, like many other plants in this booklet, it has very specific management requirements. These include a need for a medium intensity prescribed burn in autumn, every 3 to 5 years. Wildfires in spring or early summer could cause its extinction from the Park, as its seeds are not fully developed until later in the summer.





This pretty Tiger Orchid is easily distinguished by its brown spotted yellow flowers, which arise from the moist woodland soils during spring.

As one of the members of the fascinating group of Donkey Orchids, it is characterised by erect donkey ear-like petals and long tail-like sepals dangling from each flower.

Interestingly its botanical name *Diuris* comes from a Greek word meaning 'two tails'.

The Tiger Orchid has evolved its form, scent and colour patterning to mimic a female native bee in order to entice male native bees to the flower. During its attempt to mate with the flower it inadvertently pollinates the flower by transferring accumulations of pollen already dusted from earlier flower visits onto the receptive stigma. Edible tubers were harvested by Aborigines in summer and autumn.



This succulent herb forms an attractive rosette of grass-like leaves in late winter.

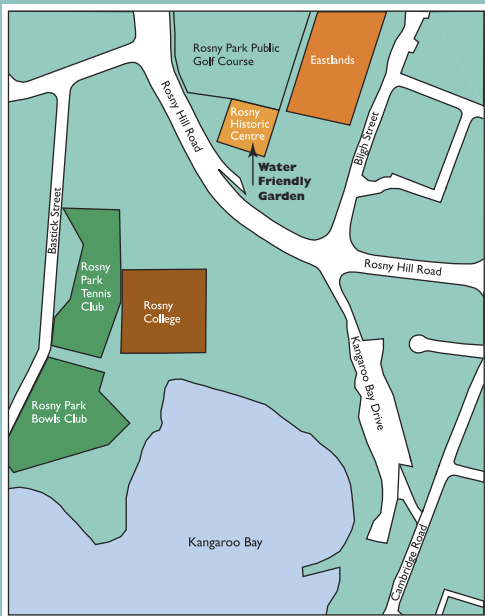
During late spring to early summer this grassy-leaved lily produces a tall flowering stem of vanilla scented, pale lilac coloured flowers.

Each individual flower appears to hang or articulate itself from the main flowering stalk. Hence the botanical name of *Arthropodium*, which is Latin for articulated foot.

By late summer the lush foliage dies back into its drought-tolerant form, consisting of ovoid underground tubers.

These tubers were dug up and harvested as a tasty treat by aboriginal women.





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