Quirky fact:
Almost every Australian knows that Burke and Wills “starved to death”, however what they don’t know is that their death was a result of rejecting the Aboriginal methods of preparing Nardoo (Marsilea drummondii).

Australian Curriculum Links

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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Background Information

Aboriginal people have occupied the Australian continent for at least 40 thousand years, and over this time they have found ways of surviving that reveal an extensive and detailed knowledge of the environment. Their understanding of native plants goes far beyond just knowing what is edible. They used plants for healing and medicine, and for weapons and tools. They understood the changes of the seasons and the life cycles of animals and plants, and how these processes affected their own survival. However, current knowledge of Aboriginal diet and herbal medicine is quite limited.

The Australian bush contains a bounty of wild edible plant species that runs into the thousands, ranging from starchy seeds and tangy fruits to mushrooms, tubers, leaves and seaweeds. However, knowing how to identify edible plants is not easy. The knowledge Aboriginal people have about which plants are edible, which plants are poisonous, and which plants are poisonous but can be prepared in certain ways that make them safe to eat would have been acquired over generations (6,000 years) of trial and error.

To the Aborigines, plant foods supplied up to 80 per cent of their diet in desert regions, and as little as 40 per cent in coastal areas, where shellfish, fish and game were abundant. Diets and food preparation techniques varied from one region to another and also from one tribe to another. Local custom and belief often affected what was hunted and gathered (i.e. would not eat totemic animals).

It has been suggested that Aborigines were originally a relatively healthy people before the arrival of Europeans (brought infectious diseases) and thus needed little medication. Occasional digestive upsets (causing diarrhoea), fevers, toothaches, and sores, colds, rheumatism and wounds were all adequately treated with a large variety of herbal remedies. Most bush medicines were applied, as rubs or poultices; or inhaled, for example by using crushed aromatic leaves.

Indigenous Australian foods have always been integrated to some extent in Australian food culture. It is certainly true that in colonial times, those settlers who learned about local foods from the Aborigines and used them or who experimented for themselves fared much better than those who did not. However, as time progressed and supplies of exotic foodstuffs became more accessible, this knowledge was ignored. As transport links developed, even country cooks abandoned the use of wild foods which could not compete with those of overseas origin in terms of harvestable quantities and culinary attention.
Inquiry Questions

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>What adaptations do native plants have to living in Outback ecosystems?</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>In what ways can native plants be helpful to different people?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Points of Interest

- **Bush Tucker Garden**
  - Lake Fred Tritton
  - Hillier St [southern end], Richmond Qld 4822
  - Phone: (07) 4741 3429  1300KRONOK
  - Email: enquiries@kronosauruskorner.com.au
  - Website: www.kronosauruskorner.com.au

- **Kronosaurus Korner, Richmond**

- **Pioneer Cemetery, Richmond**

- **Lake Fred Tritton, Richmond**

- **Historical Walk, Richmond**

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
- Commonwealth Department of Environment
  - www.environment.gov.au

REFERENCES


Thozet, A. (1986). Notes on some of the roots, tubers, bulbs and fruits, used as vegetable food by the Aboriginals of Northern Queensland, Australia. Rockhampton; W H Buzacott.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Richmond Shire Council
- www.richmond.qld.gov.au

Kronosaurus Korner
- www.kronosauruskorner.com.au

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