

AUSTRALIAN ARID INTERIOR & DESERT RANGES PLANT SURVIVAL GUIDE

Oceania • USDA-EQUIVALENT ZONES 8-12 • KÖPPEN BWh / BWk

LAND + WATER

REGIONAL HABITAT ILLUSTRATION — NOT AN ID PHOTO

USEFUL

EDIBLE

MEDICINAL

POISONOUS

IDENTIFY • EAT • BUILD • HEAL • AVOID

Illustrations show habitat and form; verify every plant with current regional photographs and expert sources.

REGION AT A GLANCE

A continental bioclimatic region, not a destination or a promise that every listed plant occurs at every site.



Continent: Oceania USDA-equivalent hardiness: 8-12 Köppen: BWh / BWk
 Regional habitat: Spinifex plain, mulga woodland, rocky range and ephemeral creek
 Zone warning: hardiness describes winter minimum temperature only; rainfall, heat, soils, fire, elevation and seasonality still control the flora.

FIELD PRIORITIES

- Use the continent, climate band and habitat as filters — never as proof of identity.
- Match at least three independent traits and rule out every dangerous look-alike before harvest.
- Treat water plants as both botanical and water-quality decisions; parasites, sewage and algal toxins can defeat correct identification.
- Take material from deadfall or abundant growth first. Roots, bark and whole plants are the most destructive harvests.
- Medicinal notes document traditional use only; the guide gives no dosing and does not replace medical care.

SURVIVAL STANDARD

A correct plant name is only the beginning. Also verify plant part, maturity, preparation, dose, contamination, legal access and local cultural protocol. When any one of those is uncertain, do not consume or medicate.

POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION AND PRACTICAL USE

The illustrations are form diagrams. The linked POWO and iNaturalist pages provide current photographs and taxonomic context.

- 1. PLACE**
Confirm continent, elevation, water regime, soil and disturbance.
- 2. FORM**
Tree, shrub, vine, herb, grass, sedge, palm, fern, succulent or aquatic.
- 3. LEAF**
Arrangement, veins, edge, hairs, glands, sap, odor and underside.
- 4. STEM / BARK**
Thorns, pith, nodes, buds, lenticels, fibers, latex and branching.
- 5. FLOWER / FRUIT**
Petal count, inflorescence, fruit attachment, seed and maturity.
- 6. EXCLUDE**
Name every dangerous look-alike and explain why it is different.
- 7. VERIFY**
Use current regional flora, qualified local knowledge and several photos.

AUTOMATIC STOP LIST

No tasting to identify.
No unknown roots, bulbs or white umbels.
No unknown milky sap.
No raw wetland foods.
No medicinal dose experiments.
No smoke from unknown toxic wood.

USEFUL-PLANT HIERARCHY

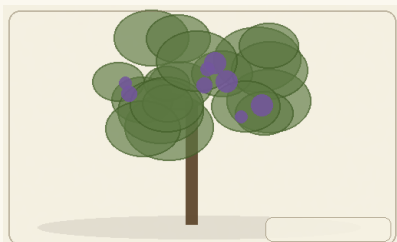
1. Deadfall and shed bark.
2. Abundant annual greens and fruit.
3. Pruned shoots and leaves.
4. Small stems from common thickets.
5. Roots, bark and whole plants only with permission and no safer substitute.

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

Wood, fiber, tinder, bow-and-arrow components, friction fire, containers and construction.

MULGA

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Acacia aneura

IDENTIFY: Narrow gray-green phyllodes, rough dark bark, yellow flower spikes and flat pods.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian arid interior, hardpan plains and desert ranges. Season: Seeds seasonal; wood year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Dense wood for bows, spear throwers, digging sticks, handles and hot coals; seeds have documented food use after correct processing.

CAUTION: Many wattles have toxic seeds. Positive species identification and traditional preparation are essential.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other Acacia species differ in phyllode shape, glands and pod form.

TASKS: bow wood, tools, fuel, food seed

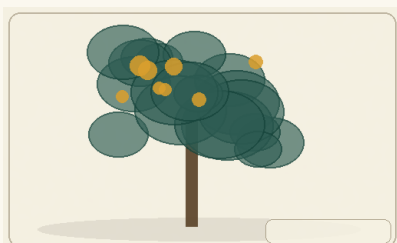
Verified images: POWO

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EUCALYPTS

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Eucalyptus / Corymbia spp.

IDENTIFY: Oil-dotted aromatic leaves; bark may be smooth, fibrous, stringy or flaky; woody capsule “gumnuts.”

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian forests, woodland and savanna; planted worldwide. Season: Wood and bark year-round; flowers seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Hard wood for bows, spear shafts, handles and fuel; shedding bark can be tinder; hollow limbs may hold water only after careful inspection.

CAUTION: Many species are extremely hard and split dangerously. Oils and leaves are not food; fire behavior is intense.

LOOK-ALIKES: Melaleuca has papery bark and bottlebrush flowers.

TASKS: bow wood, spear, handles, fuel, tinder

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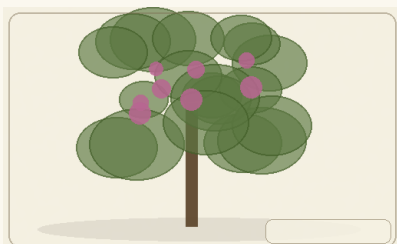
2

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

Wood, fiber, tinder, bow-and-arrow components, friction fire, containers and construction.

SHE-OAKS / CASUARINAS

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Casuarina / Allocasuarina spp.

IDENTIFY: Fine jointed needle-like branchlets; tiny scale leaves at joints; woody cone-like fruits; furrowed bark.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian coast, woodland, riverbanks and Pacific shores. Season: Wood year-round; seeds seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Dense wood for spear shafts, clubs, handles, bows and excellent coals; fine dry branchlets are tinder.

CAUTION: Heavy limbs fall in wind. Do not confuse branchlets with edible Ephedra.

LOOK-ALIKES: Tamarisk has finer feathery twigs and pink flowers, not woody cones.

TASKS: bow wood, spear, handles, fuel, tinder

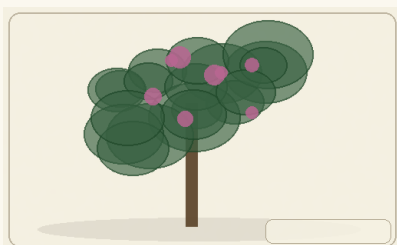
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GRASS TREES

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Xanthorrhoea spp.

IDENTIFY: Dense crown of long narrow leaves above a blackened trunk; tall spear-like flower spike.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian heath, sclerophyll forest and dry woodland. Season: Leaves year-round; flower spike seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Leaf bases and resin have adhesive and fire-lighting uses; dead flower stalks make friction-fire spindles and spear shafts.

CAUTION: Plants are extremely slow-growing and often protected. Resin and smoke can irritate.

LOOK-ALIKES: Yucca has softer trunk forms and bell flowers; grass trees have tiny flowers on a dense spear.

TASKS: adhesive, tinder, bow drill spindle, spear

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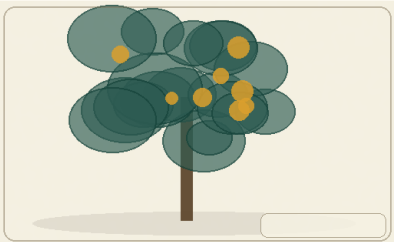
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USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

Wood, fiber, tinder, bow-and-arrow components, friction fire, containers and construction.

TEMPERATE WATTLES

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Acacia dealbata / A. melanoxylon group

IDENTIFY: Flattened phyllodes or feathery leaves; yellow puffball flowers; pods; often dark hard wood.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian temperate forest, heath and river valleys. Season: Seeds seasonal; wood year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Selected seeds are documented food after processing; blackwood and related species make bows, tools, handles and fuel.

CAUTION: Seed edibility varies widely and some wattles contain toxic compounds.

LOOK-ALIKES: Non-native acacias and bipinnate legumes require close pod and gland comparison.

TASKS: food seed, bow wood, handles, fuel

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MATERIAL SELECTION SCREEN

Before cutting, test straightness, grain, dryness, hidden rot, sap or smoke toxicity, and whether the species is protected. Match the material to the load: springy bow wood, straight shaft wood, soft dry hearth board, harder spindle, fibrous cordage, or resin-free cooking fuel.

LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods on dry or seasonally dry ground. Preparation and contamination still matter.

QUANDONG

LAND FOOD



Santalum acuminatum

IDENTIFY: Narrow gray-green leaves; bright red round fruit with one deeply pitted stone; root-parasitic shrub.

Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian arid and semi-arid woodland. Season: Fruit seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Ripe fruit flesh is documented food; hard pitted stones can be crafted and kernels have specialized traditional uses.

CAUTION: Kernel use requires expert preparation. Do not uproot this root-parasitic plant.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other Santalum fruits vary in color and edibility.

TASKS: food fruit, craft

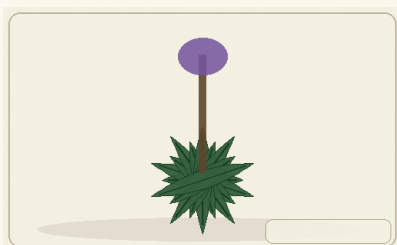
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COMMON PURSLANE

LAND FOOD



Portulaca oleracea

IDENTIFY: Low reddish succulent stems; smooth fleshy leaves; tiny yellow flowers; clear sap.

Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

HABITAT / SEASON: Disturbed warm ground, gardens, river deposits and camp edges worldwide. Season: Warm growing season.

SURVIVAL USE: Young leaves and stems are documented food and water-rich greens.

CAUTION: High oxalate content; avoid large amounts with kidney disease and avoid contaminated ground.

LOOK-ALIKES: Spurge often exude milky sap and are unsafe.

TASKS: food green

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LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods on dry or seasonally dry ground. Preparation and contamination still matter.

SALTBUSHES

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Atriplex spp.

IDENTIFY: Gray or mealy alternate leaves; inconspicuous flowers; often salt-tolerant and sprawling.

HABITAT / SEASON: Deserts, salt flats, coasts and disturbed dry ground. Season: Leaves most of year.

SURVIVAL USE: Leaves of selected species are documented cooked greens; stems can fuel small fires and brush shelters.

CAUTION: High salt and oxalate content makes this a small-portion food, especially when dehydrated or kidney-impaired.

LOOK-ALIKES: Many gray desert shrubs resemble saltbush; fruiting bracts help confirm.

TASKS: food green, fuel, brush

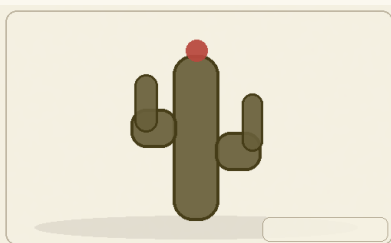
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PRICKLY PEARS

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Opuntia spp.

IDENTIFY: Flattened pads with clusters of fine glochids and often spines; showy flowers; fleshy fruits.

HABITAT / SEASON: Dry Americas, disturbed warm regions and some Mediterranean/African landscapes. Season: Fruit summer-fall; young pads seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Ripe fruit and properly de-spined young pads of confirmed species are documented foods; dry woody joints can support fuel.

CAUTION: Invisible glochids embed in skin, eyes and mouth. Some fruits are insipid or seedy; avoid sprayed invasive stands.

LOOK-ALIKES: Chollas have cylindrical joints.

TASKS: food fruit, food pad, fuel

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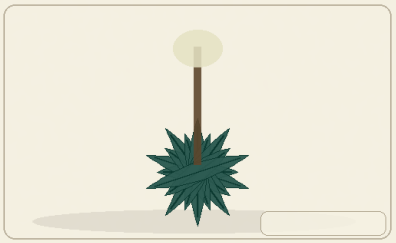
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LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

Documented foods on dry or seasonally dry ground. Preparation and contamination still matter.

PIGFACE

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Carpobrotus rossii and related spp.

IDENTIFY: Ground-hugging succulent with triangular leaves, large daisy-like flowers and fleshy fig-like fruit.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian and southern African coasts, dunes and salt spray zones. Season: Fruit seasonal; leaves year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Ripe fruit and selected leaf preparations are documented food; leaves provide moisture and have external traditional use.

CAUTION: Very salty or sour tissues can upset stomach. Avoid polluted beaches and hybrid plants.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other iceplants are smaller and may not share food traditions.

TASKS: food fruit, food green, medicine

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FOOD HARVEST SCREEN

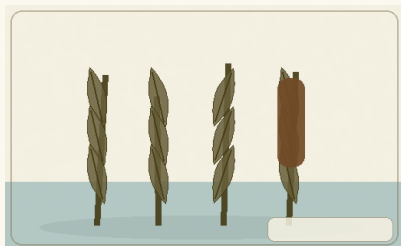
Confirm species, plant part and maturity. Check whether cooking, leaching, peeling, fermenting or repeated water changes are required. Reject mold, animal contamination, roadside plants, chemically treated ground and any food whose safe preparation cannot be completed with current water and fuel.

WATER AND WETLAND EDIBLE PLANTS

Freshwater, marsh, tidal and marine foods. Correct ID does not make dirty water safe.

CUMBUNGI / AUSTRALIAN CATTAILS

AQUATIC FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Typha domingensis / T. orientalis

IDENTIFY: Tall flat leaves and brown cylindrical flower spikes.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian wetlands, billabongs and slow rivers. Season: Shoots and pollen seasonal; rhizomes longer.

SURVIVAL USE: Young shoots, pollen and processed rhizome starch have documented food use; leaves make mats and tinder.

CAUTION: Wetland contamination and crocodile habitat are serious.

LOOK-ALIKES: Yellow flag iris lacks the brown cylinder and is toxic.

TASKS: food shoot, food starch, basketry, tinder

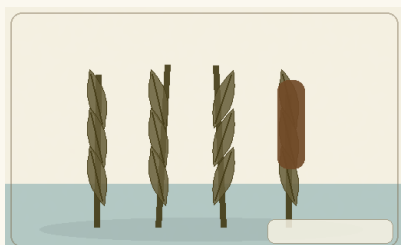
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WATER RIBBONS

AQUATIC FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Triglochin procera complex

IDENTIFY: Long ribbon leaves in freshwater; flower stalks with many small green flowers; underground tubers.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian freshwater lakes, swamps and slow rivers. Season: Tubers and leaf bases seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Tubers and tender parts have documented Aboriginal food use after appropriate cooking.

CAUTION: Taxonomy is complex and wetland contamination matters. Do not confuse with toxic arrowgrass relatives.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other Triglochin species may contain cyanogenic compounds.

TASKS: food tuber

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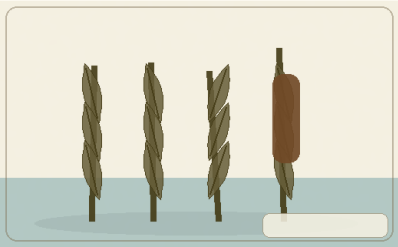
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WATER AND WETLAND EDIBLE PLANTS

Freshwater, marsh, tidal and marine foods. Correct ID does not make dirty water safe.

BULRUSHES

AQUATIC FOOD



Schoenoplectus spp.

IDENTIFY: Round or triangular mostly leafless stems; small brown flower clusters near stem tips.

HABITAT / SEASON: Freshwater and brackish marshes, pond edges and slow rivers. Season: Young shoots spring; rhizomes and stems longer.

SURVIVAL USE: Rhizomes and young shoots have documented food use after correct species identification; stems make mats, cordage and basket frames.

CAUTION: Wetland contamination is a major risk. Several sedges are difficult to separate.

LOOK-ALIKES: Cattails have broad flat leaves and a brown cylinder.

TASKS: food shoot, food starch, basketry, cordage

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AQUATIC HARVEST SCREEN

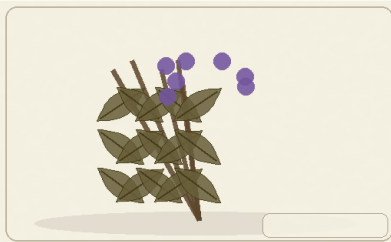
Check five separate questions: Is the species correct? Is the plant part edible? Is the water free of sewage, mining or farm runoff? Are parasites or harmful algal blooms plausible? Is entry and exit from the water safe? A “yes” to the plant and a “no” to the water still means do not eat.

MEDICINAL AND TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

Traditional and historical uses only — no dosing, diagnosis or treatment claims.

TEA TREES

TRADITIONAL-USE



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Melaleuca alternifolia and related spp.

IDENTIFY: Narrow oil-dotted leaves; papery bark; white flower spikes; small woody capsules.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian wetlands and stream flats. Season: Leaves and bark year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Papery bark is tinder and wrapping; leaves have documented external traditional uses and commercial oil production.

CAUTION: Essential oil is toxic if swallowed and can burn skin undiluted.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other *Melaleuca* species vary; not all oils have the same chemistry.

TASKS: tinder, wrap, medicine

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YARROW

TRADITIONAL-USE



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Achillea millefolium

IDENTIFY: Aromatic finely divided leaves; flat clusters of small white to pink flower heads.

HABITAT / SEASON: Dry openings, trails, grassland, shore gravel and disturbed soil. Season: Summer through fall.

SURVIVAL USE: Documented traditional external uses include washes and aromatic preparations; dry flower heads make light tinder.

CAUTION: Possible allergy, pregnancy and anticoagulant concerns. Not a substitute for wound cleaning or medical care.

LOOK-ALIKES: Poison hemlock is much taller with hollow purple-spotted stems and true umbels.

TASKS: medicine, tinder

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MEDICINAL AND TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

Traditional and historical uses only — no dosing, diagnosis or treatment claims.

EPHEDRA / JOINTFIR
TRADITIONAL-USE



Ephedra spp.

IDENTIFY: Green jointed nearly leafless stems; small cone-like reproductive structures; woody base.

HABITAT / SEASON: Asian, American and Mediterranean deserts and steppe. Season: Stems year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Straight jointed stems make light tinder and have documented traditional medicinal history.

CAUTION: Ephedrine-type alkaloids can cause dangerous heart, blood pressure and drug effects. No self-dosing.

LOOK-ALIKES: Casuarina is a tree with many fine drooping branchlets and woody cones.

TASKS: tinder, medicine

Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

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MEDITICINAL RESTRAINT

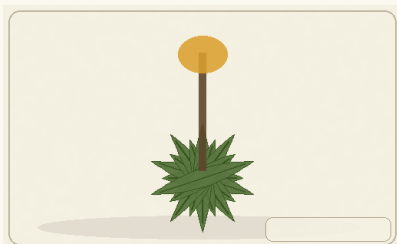
A plant can be culturally important and pharmacologically active yet still be the wrong survival choice. Unknown concentration, dehydration, pregnancy, allergies, chronic illness and medicine interactions can turn a traditional remedy into a second emergency.

POISONOUS PLANTS AND DANGEROUS LOOK-ALIKES

High-consequence species to learn before gathering starts.

AUSTRALIAN CYCADS

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Macrozamia / Cycas spp.

IDENTIFY: Crown of stiff pinnate leaves; exposed cones or large seeds; stout trunk or underground stem.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian forest, woodland and desert ranges. Season: Seeds seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: No survival food use in this guide. Leaves have limited thatch value.

CAUTION: Seeds and tissues contain powerful toxins. Traditional detoxification is complex and failure can be fatal or neurotoxic.

LOOK-ALIKES: True palms have flowers and enclosed fruits, not cycad cones.

TASKS: poison

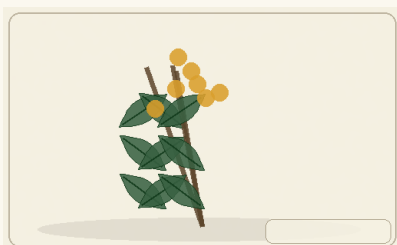
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NATIVE TOBACCO

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Nicotiana spp.

IDENTIFY: Sticky or gray-green leaves; tubular flowers; capsules with many tiny seeds.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian arid and disturbed ground; also worldwide tobacco relatives. Season: Growing season.

SURVIVAL USE: No food or field medicine use.

CAUTION: Nicotine and related alkaloids can cause vomiting, seizures, breathing failure and death.

LOOK-ALIKES: Some edible greens have similar soft leaves but lack tubular flowers.

TASKS: poison

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POISONOUS PLANTS AND DANGEROUS LOOK-ALIKES

High-consequence species to learn before gathering starts.

DATURAS / THORN APPLES

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Datura spp.

IDENTIFY: Large foul-smelling leaves; upright trumpet flowers; spiny egg-shaped capsules.

HABITAT / SEASON: Disturbed warm ground, dry riverbeds and fields worldwide. Season: Summer-fall.

SURVIVAL USE: No use.

CAUTION: All parts contain dangerous tropane alkaloids causing delirium, overheating, seizures and death.

LOOK-ALIKES: Brugmansia has hanging trumpets on woody shrubs and is also toxic.

TASKS: poison

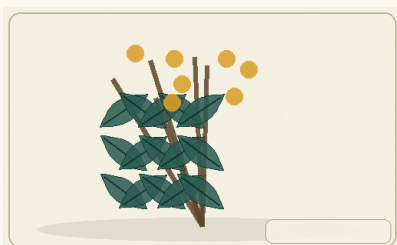
Verified images: POWO

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OLEANDER

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Nerium oleander

IDENTIFY: Evergreen shrub with narrow leathery leaves in pairs or whorls and pink, white or red five-petaled flowers.

HABITAT / SEASON: Mediterranean and arid-region waterways, wadis and planted settlements. Season: Year-round foliage.

SURVIVAL USE: No use.

CAUTION: All parts contain potent cardiac glycosides; smoke, skewers and contaminated water can be dangerous.

LOOK-ALIKES: Yellow oleander has different fruit but similar cardiac toxicity.

TASKS: poison

Verified images: POWO

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SURVIVAL TASK MATRIX

Choose the least destructive plant that meets the job. A material that works poorly but is abundant may beat the perfect rare species.

TASK	BEST REGIONAL CANDIDATES IN THIS GUIDE	FIELD DECISION
Bow / spring wood	Mulga, Eucalypts, She-oaks / casuarinas, Temperate wattles	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Arrow or dart shaft	No reliable candidate among the priority profiles.	Use a different technology or carried tool; do not force unsuitable plant material.
Bow-drill hearth	No reliable candidate among the priority profiles.	Use a different technology or carried tool; do not force unsuitable plant material.
Bow-drill spindle	Grass trees	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Tinder	Eucalypts, She-oaks / casuarinas, Grass trees, Cumbungi / Australian cattails	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Fuel / coals	Mulga, Eucalypts, She-oaks / casuarinas, Temperate wattles	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Cordage / fiber	Bulrushes	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Basket / mat	Cumbungi / Australian cattails, Bulrushes	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Container / wrap	No reliable candidate among the priority profiles.	Use a different technology or carried tool; do not force unsuitable plant material.
Fruit food	Quandong, Prickly pears, Pigface	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Green food	Common purslane, Saltbushes, Pigface	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Seed / nut	Mulga, Temperate wattles	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Root / starch	Cumbungi / Australian cattails, Bulrushes	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Traditional-use	Pigface, Tea trees, Yarrow, Ephedra / jointfir	Documented use only; no field dosing.

SEASONAL OPERATING RHYTHM

PHASE	PRIMARY OPPORTUNITY	PRIMARY RISK
Early growth	Shoots, greens, flowers, sap and easy bark identification.	Toxic shoots and bulbs are hardest to separate before flowering.
Peak growth	Maximum leaf and flower information; fiber plants mature.	Heat, insects, sap and water contamination.
Fruit / seed	Highest food density; nuts, berries, pods, grains and tubers.	Mold, wildlife encounters and unripe or toxic fruit.
Dormant / dry	Wood, bark, evergreen leaves, persistent fruit and roots.	Fewer diagnostic traits; overharvest of stored underground parts.

SOURCES, IMAGE VERIFICATION AND EMERGENCY

Every profile links to current taxonomic and photograph searches. Treat community photographs as evidence to compare, not as a final authority.

1. 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map
USDA Agricultural Research Service — hardiness-zone reference

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>

2. Plants of the World Online
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew — taxonomy, distribution and images

<https://powo.science.kew.org/>

3. World Flora Online
World Flora Online Consortium — global plant taxonomy

<https://www.worldfloraonline.org/>

4. Global Biodiversity Information Facility
GBIF Secretariat — occurrence records and licensed media

<https://www.gbif.org/>

5. World Checklist of Useful Plant Species
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew — documented plant uses

<https://kew.iro.bl.uk/concern/datasets/7243d727-e28d-419d-a8f7-9ebef5b9e03e>

6. Poison Control
National Capital Poison Center — poisoning first-response guidance

<https://www.poison.org/>

7. WHO Monographs on Selected Medicinal Plants
World Health Organization — medicinal-plant safety and monographs

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9241545178>

8. Atlas of Living Australia
CSIRO and Australian biodiversity partners — Australian occurrence and licensed media

<https://www.ala.org.au/>

9. Australian Plant Census
Council of Heads of Australasian Herbaria — Australian accepted names

<https://biodiversity.org.au/nsl/services/APC>

SUSPECTED POISONING

Stop exposure. Remove material from the mouth and rinse. Do not induce vomiting unless directed. Save a sample or clear photographs. Contact local emergency services or a poison center. Monitor airway, breathing and consciousness.

PUBLICATION LIMITS

Regional lists are representative, not exhaustive. Species ranges, names, laws and preparation practices change. Local floras, land managers, Indigenous knowledge holders, poison centers and clinicians take precedence.