

AUSTRALIAN TROPICAL NORTH & MONSOON SAVANNA PLANT SURVIVAL GUIDE

Oceania • USDA-EQUIVALENT ZONES 11-13 • KÖPPEN Aw / Am



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: 11-13 Köppen: Aw / Am

Regional habitat: Eucalypt savanna, monsoon vine forest, billabong and mangrove

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

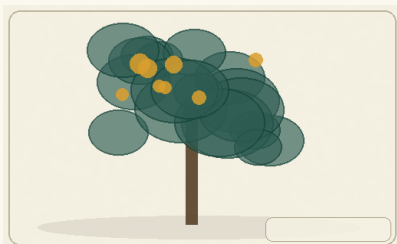
1. Deadfall and shed bark.
2. Abundant annual greens and fruit.
3. Pruned shoots and leaves.
4. Small stems from common thickets.
5. Roots, bark and whole plants only with permission and no safer substitute.

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

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

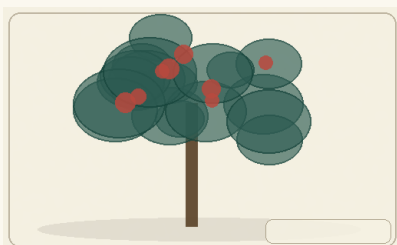
Verified images: POWO

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PAPERBARKS

USEFUL MATERIAL



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Melaleuca spp.

IDENTIFY: Papery layered bark; narrow oil-dotted leaves; cream bottlebrush flower spikes and woody capsules.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian wetlands, monsoon forest, swamp and coast. Season: Year-round bark and wood.

SURVIVAL USE: Loose outer bark is excellent tinder, wrapping and temporary waterproofing; wood makes poles and fuel; some species yield tea-tree oils.

CAUTION: Do not ring-bark living trees. Essential oils are concentrated and not for drinking.

LOOK-ALIKES: Eucalypts have gumnuts and different bark; bottlebrush Callistemon forms are related.

TASKS: tinder, wrap, poles, fuel, medicine

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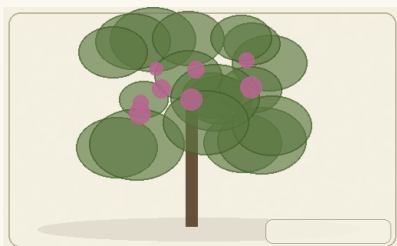
2

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

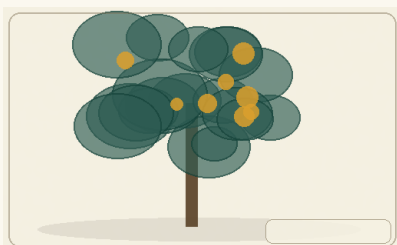
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TEMPERATE WATTLES

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

Verified images: POWO

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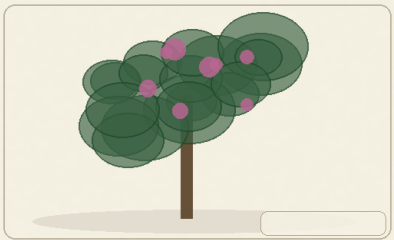
4

USEFUL PLANTS FOR TOOLS, FIRE AND SHELTER

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

GRASS TREES

USEFUL MATERIAL



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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MATERIAL SELECTION SCREEN

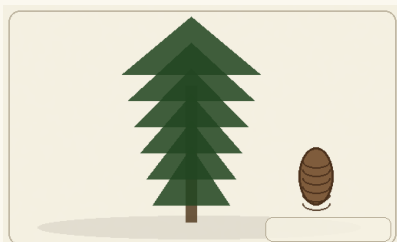
Before cutting, test straightness, grain, dryness, hidden rot, sap or smoke toxicity, and whether the species is protected. Match the material to the load: springy bow wood, straight shaft wood, soft dry hearth board, harder spindle, fibrous cordage, or resin-free cooking fuel.

LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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

BUNYA PINE

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Araucaria bidwillii

IDENTIFY: Massive conifer with stiff pointed leaves and enormous heavy cones containing large seeds.

HABITAT / SEASON: Subtropical eastern Australian rainforest and old plantings. Season: Cones late summer; wood year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Large seeds are documented food after roasting or boiling; wood has construction use.

CAUTION: Falling cones can kill. Trees and harvest areas may be culturally protected.

LOOK-ALIKES: Hoop pine has smaller cones and narrower leaves.

TASKS: food seed, construction

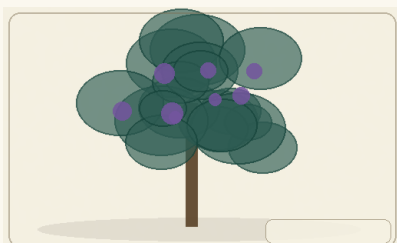
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LILLY PILLY GROUP

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Syzygium / Acmena spp.

IDENTIFY: Opposite glossy oil-dotted leaves; brush-like white flowers; pink, red or purple fleshy fruits.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australian rainforest, wet forest and streams. Season: Fruit seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Ripe fruits of confirmed species are documented food; hard wood makes pegs and handles.

CAUTION: Many Myrtaceae look similar. Fruit flavor varies and urban trees may be sprayed.

LOOK-ALIKES: Privets have opposite leaves but different flowers and usually black berries.

TASKS: food fruit, pegs, handles

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LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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

BANANAS AND PLANTAINS

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Musa spp.

IDENTIFY: Large paddle leaves from layered leaf bases forming a pseudostem; hanging flower and fruit cluster.

HABITAT / SEASON: Tropical forest gaps, river valleys and old cultivation. Season: Fruit and shoots year-round where warm.

SURVIVAL USE: Ripe fruit and cooked green fruit of known cultivars are food; leaves wrap food and shed rain; pseudostem fibers make cordage and tinder.

CAUTION: Wild bananas may contain many hard seeds. Sap stains and plantations are owned.

LOOK-ALIKES: Heliconia has smaller fruits and different flower bracts.

TASKS: food fruit, leaf wrap, cordage, tinder

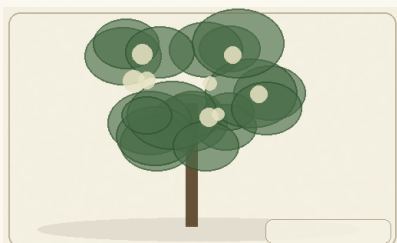
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PANDANUS / SCREW PINE

LAND FOOD



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Pandanus spp.

IDENTIFY: Spiral clusters of long saw-edged leaves; prop roots; pineapple-like segmented fruits.

HABITAT / SEASON: Pacific and Southeast Asian coasts, swamps and volcanic islands. Season: Fruit seasonal; leaves year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Fruit keys of selected species are documented food after local processing; leaves make mats, sails, baskets and cordage.

CAUTION: Species and fruit processing vary; leaf edges cut skin. Some fruit is barely edible or requires cooking.

LOOK-ALIKES: Pineapples are ground rosettes and lack prop roots.

TASKS: food fruit, basketry, cordage, thatch

Verified images: POWO

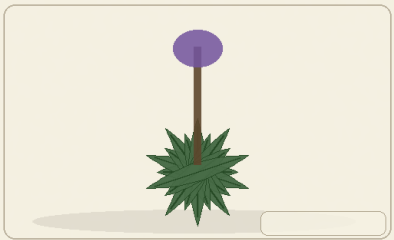
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LAND-BASED EDIBLE PLANTS

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

WARRIGAL GREENS
LAND FOOD



Tetragonia tetragonioides

IDENTIFY: Spreading plant with triangular fleshy leaves and tiny yellow flowers at leaf axils.

HABITAT / SEASON: Australasian coasts, dunes and saline disturbed ground. Season: Warm season.

SURVIVAL USE: Young leaves are documented cooked greens.
 CAUTION: High oxalate content; blanch and discard water. Avoid polluted shorelines.
 LOOK-ALIKES: Atriplex saltbushes are woody and often gray-mealy.
 TASKS: food green

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FOOD HARVEST SCREEN

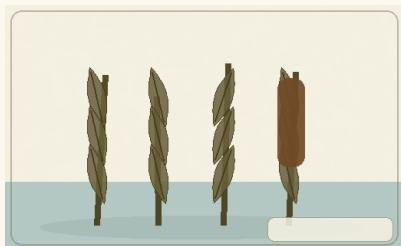
Confirm species, plant part and maturity. Check whether cooking, leaching, peeling, fermenting or repeated water changes are required. Reject mold, animal contamination, roadside plants, chemically treated ground and any food whose safe preparation cannot be completed with current water and fuel.

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

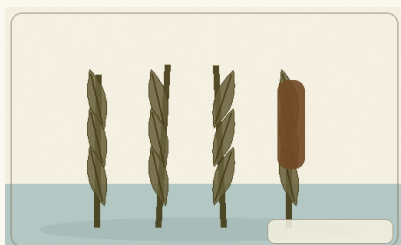
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WATER RIBBONS

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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WATER AND WETLAND EDIBLE PLANTS

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

BLACK MANGROVES
AQUATIC FOOD



Avicennia spp.

IDENTIFY: Opposite gray-green leaves, salt crystals often visible; many upright pencil-like pneumatophores around the trunk.

HABITAT / SEASON: Tropical and subtropical intertidal flats. Season: Year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Wood for fuel and small poles; leaves and bark have documented regional uses; habitats support shellfish and fish.

CAUTION: Seeds of some species require extensive traditional leaching and are not recommended without local expertise. Tides and mud are hazardous.

LOOK-ALIKES: Red mangroves have arching stilt roots and long propagules.

TASKS: fuel, poles, habitat

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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

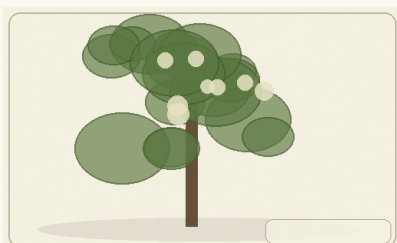
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LEMON MYRTLE

TRADITIONAL-USE



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Backhousia citriodora

IDENTIFY: Opposite glossy leaves with strong lemon scent when crushed; cream brush flowers.

HABITAT / SEASON: Subtropical Australian rainforest and edges. Season: Leaves year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: Leaves are documented seasoning and aromatic traditional-use material; wood provides light tools.

CAUTION: Do not ingest essential oil. Confirm species before using strongly aromatic leaves.

LOOK-ALIKES: Lemon-scented gum has alternate adult leaves and gumnuts.

TASKS: seasoning, medicine, tools

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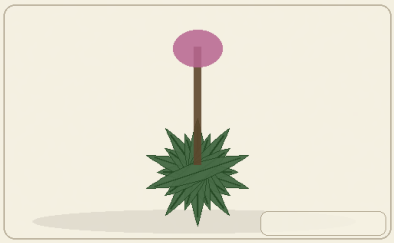
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MEDICINAL AND TRADITIONAL-USE PLANTS

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

AFRICAN ALOES

TRADITIONAL-USE



Aloe spp.

IDENTIFY: Fleshy rosette leaves with toothed margins and spikes of tubular red, orange or yellow flowers.

HABITAT / SEASON: African drylands, rocky slopes and fynbos. Season: Leaves year-round; flowers seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: Clear inner gel of a few correctly identified species has documented external soothing use; dry stalks are tinder.

CAUTION: Yellow latex under the rind is a strong laxative and can be dangerous. Species vary; do not eat aloe in the field.

LOOK-ALIKES: Agaves are New World plants with fibrous leaves and different flowers.

TASKS: medicine, tinder

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MEDICINAL RESTRAINT

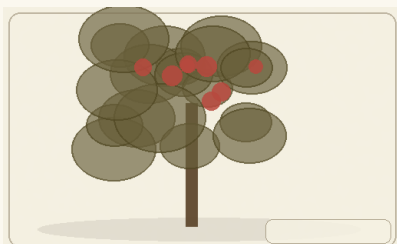
A plant can be culturally important and pharmacologically active yet still be the wrong survival choice. Unknown concentration, dehydration, pregnancy, allergies, chronic illness and medicine interactions can turn a traditional remedy into a second emergency.

POISONOUS PLANTS AND DANGEROUS LOOK-ALIKES

High-consequence species to learn before gathering starts.

GYMPIE-GYMPIE

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Dendrocnide moroides

IDENTIFY: Shrub or small tree with broad heart-shaped leaves densely covered in fine stinging hairs; small berry-like fruits.

HABITAT / SEASON: Northeastern Australian rainforest gaps and tracks. Season: Year-round.

SURVIVAL USE: No use.

CAUTION: Contact can cause extreme pain lasting days to months; airborne hairs irritate eyes and lungs.

LOOK-ALIKES: Other nettle trees sting but may have narrower leaves.

TASKS: poison

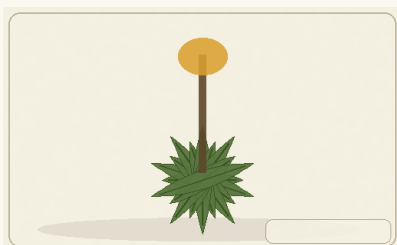
Verified images: POWO

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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

Verified images: POWO

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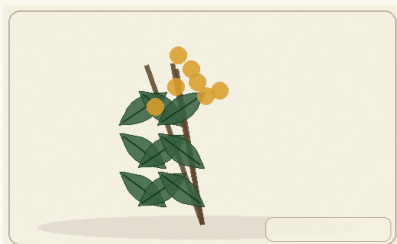
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POISONOUS PLANTS AND DANGEROUS LOOK-ALIKES

High-consequence species to learn before gathering starts.

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

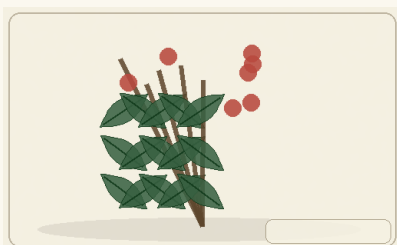
Verified images: POWO

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CASTOR BEAN

POISON — AVOID



Stylized form diagram — not an identification photograph

Ricinus communis

IDENTIFY: Large star-shaped palmately lobed leaves; spiny capsules; glossy mottled seeds.

HABITAT / SEASON: Warm disturbed ground, riverbanks and tropical/subtropical waste areas. Season: Growing season; seeds seasonal.

SURVIVAL USE: No survival food or medicine use. Oil extraction is industrial, not a field process.

CAUTION: Chewed seeds can release ricin and cause severe or fatal poisoning.

LOOK-ALIKES: Jatropha has similar lobed leaves but different fruit; it is also toxic.

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	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, Paperbarks, She-oaks / casuarinas, Grass trees	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Fuel / coals	Eucalypts, Paperbarks, She-oaks / casuarinas, Temperate wattles	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Cordage / fiber	Bananas and plantains, Pandanus / screw pine	Use dead, shed or pruned material first.
Basket / mat	Pandanus / screw pine, Cumbungi / Australian cattails	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	Lilly pilly group, Bananas and plantains, Pandanus / screw pine	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Green food	Warrigal greens	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Seed / nut	Temperate wattles, Bunya pine	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Root / starch	Cumbungi / Australian cattails	Verify part, maturity and preparation.
Traditional-use	Paperbarks, Tea trees, Lemon myrtle, African aloes	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.