## Back Yard Living

## NATIVE FOODS

not new foods
here's nothing new about bush tucker. It's just taken the Australian and international food industries a ing time to catch on to the benefits and flavours understood for generations by the Indigenous community.
y Lindy Schneider
fotos courtesy of Dan Paris Photography ww.kepakurl.com.au

LATESI food trend to hit Australian tores is not new at all. Regardless of the current hype that surrounds native foods, we escape the irrefutable truth - these foods have isted for at least 40,000 years and we have ignored em for most of that time.

Native foods have been the foundation of an digenous diet providing essential nutrients and susnance long before they became the latest fashionle condiment for a restaurant menu or home pantry. he Australian food industry has finally discovered hat our Indigenous neighbours always knew, and e food world is listening.

The growing interest in native food, (or bush ods) could be considered long overdue, but it is the dden explosion in demand that is both the chalage and the boon for native food producers.

First brought to our attention in 1988 by TV ogram Bush Tucker Man featuring Les Hiddins, a real${ }^{r}$-style program that featured the sourcing and use native foods, the industry is poised for significant owth both in Australian and overseas. From hum$=$ beginnings in the late 1980s, the industry grew to

Bayn (Coastal Pigface)



Goyal (Native Rosemary)
around $\$ 14 \mathrm{M}$ in 2004, according to CSIRO research.
Visit your local specialty food store today and you will fnd a vast array of native foods on the shelf: from bush tomato sauce to wattle-seed based pastas, pepperberry BBQ rubs and quandong jellies. Live in an upmarket suburb and even your ocal supermarket will carry these lines. In a value-added form these products are becoming increasingly accessible to the Western palate.

The bush food industry is unlike other primary produce sectors as it relies heavily on wild harvest. With growing demand, the challenges of growing commercially viable quantities, providing year round availability on highly seasonal roducts and delivering consistent quality that meets Australian regulations, all become apparent.

But there are several other important issues that must Beressed before the bush food industry is over-run by opportunists and marketers.

Maintaining the integrity of bush food products is vital. Already online bush food forums comment on the dilution of Glavour they are experiencing in commercially packaged bush Coods. Cost cutting by using an essence of the food rather than the food itself, is already being touted as one of the biggest threats to the industry

Native food purists also dislike the 'across cultures' approach being taken by some manufacturers who blend native spices into Egyptian-style dukkah mixes in an attempt to drive sales. There is a discussion to be had about adapting native foods to Western sensibilities whilst remaining authentic to traditional usage.

Native Foods are intrinsically woven into the history of Indigenous Australia and this heritage needs to be acknowedged. This requires more than placing a logo on a label or a dot painting on packaging. The knowledge, use and methods of harvesting and preparing bush foods are a cultural dynamic that must be respected. Deep inter-relationships between seasons, nature and environment have been studied and utilised for tens of thousands of years, and modern man with his belief in the dominance of modern agricultural techniques, should be reminded to consult the true growers of these foods.

Indigenous communities should benefit most from the current growth in the native foods industry. Proceeds must flow to and support the right people - the people who have always cultivated them.

South Australia is the leading Australian state in native food production and in the past decade the government has committed resources to the development of growers and dis-


## Borrn (Native Bush Onion)

 ad education and are still to instigate a strong Indigenous resence in the workforce.Mike and Gayle Quarmby of Reedy Creek are pioneers in is regard, linking their native plant nursery with the desert lands f several northern Indigenous communities ith the desert land Knowledge skills, amongst the various communities with, and profits are lared amongst the various communities with the emphasis on eveloping sustainable growing and harvesting practices. Their rogram and financial investment now provides employment or many Indigenous men and women and brings new life to ruggling communities.

The concept of eating Indigenous food off our land is an avironmentally sustainable and ethically sound proposition. he concept that Indigenous communities be sustained and upported by the bush food industry is equally sound.

Carolyn Briggs, Indigenous Proprietor, Tjanabi

Restaurant, Melbourne, sums up her approach to Native Foods by saying, "we take responsibility for knowing exactly the path our food has taken, and minimising waste, to run a sustainable establishment. We will give back to the Earth that feeds us by supporting local produce, art and communities and promoting a holistic, eco-conscious attitude."

Australians have adopted foods from many cultures, and now it's now it's our turn to offer something, beyond pavlova and lamingtons, in return. If we are to give as good as we get, then we need to give what is due to our bush food friends.

## Sources:

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- Australian Bushfoods Magazine online Web: www. ausbushfoods.com
- Tjanabi Restuarant Web: www.tjanabi.com.au

