

Fruit, Bulb, Flower

Nature was a bush calendar for the Darug. Their days were measured by the rising and setting of the sun and moon. The changing seasons heralded the life cycles of plants whose flowers, fruits and roots were not just a food source, but a medicine chest and hardware supply. As the yellow tufts of *Acacia* (wattles) burst into bloom, it was time to fish for mullet and gather the sweet-smelling flowers to soak for refreshing drinks.

The native plants provided a ready source of juicy roots and tubers, corms and bulbs which could be dug up and eaten. Leaves were often blanched and fruit stewed, while seeds, nuts, berries were only available in certain seasons. Gum from trees made for good chewing all year. Some plants had multiple uses. The tubers could be eaten, the flowers soaked for drinks or medicinal use, the seeds ground for flour and the leaves used for weaving and making nets.

Fire was an important tool in Aboriginal management of the land. Burning the bush at the right time helped to open it up, allowing new seedlings to grow and prosper. Wildlife was attracted to the new growth, and fire helped to smoke them out of the bush, making them easier to catch. Fire also provided hot coals for roasting and baking food.

Weave, wrap, wind

Climbing vines, long blady leaves and papery bark had many uses for the Darug. Some, like the twines from the vine *Glycine* were ready-made fishing lines, to which a hook, fashioned from shell, could be attached. Grasses, leaves and stems could be split, soaked or scraped with a hand tool to soften the fibre for weaving fish traps and other items. Paperbark needed little preparation and could be moistened and formed into containers for carrying and collecting water, food and fire. In larger pieces, it could be wrapped around the body for warmth or used for shelter.

Eat, chew, drink

The Darug shared some of their knowledge of the Australian bush with early colonists and showed them which native species were safe for eating and how to prepare them. The sweet nectar of some flowers could be sucked while the flowers of *Banksia*, *Callistemon* and *Grevillea*, soaked in water, made sweet refreshing drinks. *Hardenbergia* could be brewed and drunk warm. The leaves of *Pteridium* (bracken fern) could be ground to make a sticky starch paste, while *Acacia* seed pods could be heated to extract the seed, then ground into flour and baked to make bush bread. The new shoots of *Typha*, (Cumbungi or Bulrush) are tasty eaten raw, and when steamed, the young flower spikes can be eaten like sweet corn.

Soothe, heal, mend

Many plants made good bush medicines and required little preparation. Leaves were crushed and roots or bark pounded to make poultices. Oil vapour from many species, including *Eucalyptus*, could be inhaled to clear the head and leaves of *Prostanthera* (Mint Bush), crushed and placed on the temple, could soothe a headache. Roots, fruits and leaves could also be brewed in hot water to make liquids to treat wounds or be drunk to treat a variety of complaints. The wood from some wattles could be sharpened for spears or used as sticks for walking.



Clockwise from top left: Trunk of *Melaleuca styphelioides* showing its papery bark; Seed pods of *Acacia falcata*; Flower spike of *Typha orientalis*; Seed pod of native climber *Glycine tabacina*

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Burrumatta Aboriginal Landscape Trail

Parramatta Park



In association with



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Parramatta Park

“Wuru mi mittiga gurum baurruk dumul”

“Hello friends it’s good to see you in this friendly place!”

Welcome to the traditional country of the Burrumatta clan of the Darug people. ‘Burra’ means eel and ‘matta’ means creek. There’s a good reason why the Parramatta Rugby League team are called The Eels – you can still see eels in the river and creeks around here. This place was great for hunting, fishing and gathering plants – for approximately 40,000 years Aboriginal people have relied on this land for their food and shelter. It was the source of their identity and spirituality.

When Europeans first arrived here in 1788, they thought the place was great, too. They brought English agriculture and industry, establishing farms where Aboriginal people had lived and hunted. European arrival brought negative impacts on Aboriginal peoples in the form of forced dispossession from their fertile lands and devastating epidemics because of a lack of immunity. Those Burrumatta people who survived resisted what they saw as an invasion. This land was their physical and spiritual home and their descendants still retain their strong attachment to it.

Changes to the natural landscape were made by the Burrumatta, whose firestick farming altered the vegetation species along the rivers and creeks and created an open woodland better suited for grazing animals which they hunted. More recent adaptations were made by early settlers who applied more intensive agricultural techniques and the creation of the former governors’ domain and a public park. The Parramatta Park Trust with the Western Sydney Aboriginal Landcare Group have regenerated the vegetation along Domain Creek so that it’s more like the way it was when the Burrumatta clan lived here. On this trail, you’ll be able to see some of the plants that Aboriginal people used and learn more about how they lived with the land.

