

U3A Port Fairy

Science...naturally!

Wild Food Plants of Port Fairy: a culinary romp

John Miller: 21 July 2020

This is the 18th in a series of guides for U3A members around Port Fairy and district to help us get out and about safely during COVID-19 restrictions. The aim of the guides is to provide enjoyable outdoor activities that can be undertaken either by yourself or your family (with appropriate separation and other precautions).

This guide introduces you to 16 of the edible plants that you can readily find in and around Port Fairy. All of the plants listed should do you no harm if ingested – they may not be all that tasty and you may not want to include them as a regular part of your diet, but they should be safe to eat. However, as with all things that you ingest, discretion is highly recommended. Not all foods agree with all people so if you are trying some, try a little first to ensure you have no adverse reactions.

The guide provides you with a very broad overview of some of Port Fairy's wild food plants, how to recognise them and where they can be found. However, there are some poisonous plants around so if you are at all unsure of the identity of a plant – don't eat it.

Please also be aware that all native plant species are protected and a permit is required to collect them. However, you can collect introduced species – but try and avoid spreading the seeds.

As always, there are many more plants and other good stuff to discover as you wander around. If you find a plant you want to know more about, email me a photo and a short description and I will endeavour to work it out for you. jmiller3350@gmail.com

Please feel free to share this with anyone else who might enjoy the walk.







The Moyne at the Toolong Road crossing.
A bounty of wild food.







Cooking up some beaded glasswort – yum!



Some of the Wild Food Plants of Port Fairy



Common Name	Scientific Name and status	Identification features	Food features	What it looks like	Location
Salt Club-sedge	<i>Bolboschoenus caldwellii</i> Family: <i>Cyperaceae</i> (Sedge family) Native	Water plant, about 1 m tall, with a cluster of brown oval-shaped seed heads. Stem near the seed heads is triangular in cross-section.	Root tubers can be roasted. Young tubers are white and starchy and apparently have a sweet, coconut milk flavour.		Edge of creeks and swamps. Moyne River at the Toolong North Road crossing and other spots along the Moyne River.
White Elderberry	<i>Sambucus gaudichaudiana</i> Family: <i>Caprifoliaceae</i> (Honeysuckle family) Introduced	Large woody perennial shrub. Flowers are white and in large flat-topped umbels. Leaves in 5 segments like a small fern frond.	Flowers used as infusion for drinks, cordial and Champagne! Dark-red to black berries for jam.		Usually in gardens in Port Fairy but there are some good specimens with big flowers near the information centre carpark at Tower Hill.




Common Name	Scientific Name and status	Identification features	Food features	What it looks like	Location
Karkalla	<i>Carpobrotus rossii</i> Family: <i>Aizoaceae</i> (Pig-face family) Native	Prostrate scrambling perennial ground plant. Leaves very succulent and triangular in cross-section. All leaf faces equal width. Bright pink "pig-face" flowers.	All parts are edible either raw or lightly sautéed, blanched, stir-fried, or steamed.		Widespread but can always be seen in the rocks on the track to South Beach near the Passage carpark.
Rounded Noon-flower	<i>Disphyma crassifolium</i> subsp. <i>clavellatum</i> Family: <i>Aizoaceae</i> (Pig-face family) Native	Small succulent cylindrical leaves on prostrate scrambling plant. Small white, cream or pink "pig-face" flowers	All parts of <i>Disphyma</i> are edible, the leaves can be used for stir-fries, salads and for pickling.		On the ocean side of the walkway wall at the Griffiths Island lighthouse. Small patches amongst the rocks.



Common Name	Scientific Name and status	Identification features	Food features	What it looks like	Location
Bower Spinach	<i>Tetragonia implexicoma</i> Family: <i>Aizoaceae</i> (Pig-face family) Native	Usually straggling through other shrubs. Green fleshy diamond-shaped leaves and small yellow four or five-petalled flowers followed by edible red berries.	Edible leaves with a similar flavour and texture to spinach. Edible berries.		Just about anywhere there are shrubs growing on sandy areas. Battery Point and Russel Clark Reserve are good spots.
Sea Celery	<i>Apium prostratum</i> Family: <i>Apiaceae</i> (Celery family) Native	On dunes growing as a small hummock of bright green leaves looking like parsley or a small celery.	Use leaves as you would use parsley.		In sand dunes particularly where exposed to wind. The track from South Beach to the Passage carpark is a good spot.

Common Name	Scientific Name and status	Identification features	Food features	What it looks like	Location
Parsley	<i>Petroselinum crispum</i> Family: <i>Apiaceae</i> (Celery family) Introduced	Low herb to around 30 cm tall. Dissected dark green leaves and small white flowers in clusters.	Common herb widely used as a condiment and to flavour soups and stews.		Grows wild on Battery Point and around the Little East Beach launching ramp car park area.
Dandelions	<i>Taraxacum</i> species (there are lots) Family: <i>Asteraceae</i> (Daisy family) Introduced	Can be distinguished from other yellow daisy "flat weeds" by the recurved bracts on the outside of the flower (the bits below the yellow "petals"). Leaves are usually deeply incised.	Roots, leaves and flowers can be added to salads. Gives a bitter taste and is rich in vitamins.		Lawns and pastures anywhere around town.

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Salsify	<i>Tragopogon porrifolius</i> subsp. <i>porrifolius</i> Family: <i>Asteraceae</i> (Daisy family) Introduced	Large purple daisy flower on a stem up to 1 m tall. Leaves are grey and narrow with a silver stripe along the mid vein.	The roots, which exude a milky sap when damaged, can be cooked and eaten like a parsnip.		Very common and widespread in gardens and any wasteland.
Sea Rocket	<i>Cakile maritima</i> subsp. <i>maritima</i> Family: <i>Brassicaceae</i> (Cabbage family) Introduced	Always on the upper edge of a beach at the toe of a dune. Purple four-petalled flowers. Seedpod looks a bit like a rocket. Leaves are quite thick and fleshy.	Apparently has a strong mustard flavour likened to wasabi. Best eaten raw and in small amounts. Cooking makes it bitter.		Upper margins of ocean beaches. There are usually a few on South Beach.

Common Name	Scientific Name and status	Identification features	Food features	What it looks like	Location
Sand Rocket	<i>Diploaxis tenuifolia</i> Family: <i>Brassicaceae</i> (Cabbage family) Introduced	Straggly erect plant to about 50 cm tall with very bright yellow four-petalled flowers and lobed leaves.	Leaves can be used in salads as you would Rocket from the supermarket. Much stronger flavour than the bought variety.		Very widespread alongside paths particularly on sandy areas.
Watercress	<i>Nasturtium officinale</i> Family: <i>Brassicaceae</i> (Cabbage family) Introduced	Confined to freshwater swamps and the margins of waterways. Clusters of small white four-petalled flowers. Seed pods are long and thin.	Leaves are used raw in salads		Moyne River at the Toolong North Road crossing and other spots along the Moyne River.

Common Name	Scientific Name and status	Identification features	Food features	What it looks like	Location
Seaberry Saltbush	<i>Rhagodia candolleana</i> subsp. <i>candolleana</i> Family: <i>Chenopodiaceae</i> (Saltbush family) Native	Very widespread scrambling shrub recognised by the clusters of small fleshy red berries and	The bitter berries can be eaten raw.		Anywhere there are shrubs growing on sandy areas. Battery Point and Russel Clark Reserve are good spots.
Beaded Glasswort	<i>Sarcocornia quinqueflora</i> Family: <i>Chenopodiaceae</i> (Saltbush family) Native	Leafless jointed stems growing in clumps in areas periodically inundated by sea water.	The stems can be prepared like asparagus. The central stem can be a bit tough.		Areas periodically inundated by sea water like the area at the start of the Griffiths Island causeway and along the banks Moyne River near the footbridge.
Nettles: Small Nettle and Scrub Nettle	<i>Urtica urens</i> and <i>Urtica incisa</i> Family: <i>Urticaceae</i> (Nettle family) Introduced	Low herb with bright green leaves with serrated edges. Stinging hairs on the leaves and stems can cause irritation.	Use like spinach – steam or mix in with other stir fry ingredients.		Waste land and around stock pens where there are extra nutrients. Moyne River at the Toolong North Road crossing is a good spot.

Common Name	Scientific Name and status	Identification features	Food features	What it looks like	Location
Narrow-leaf Cumbungi	<i>Typha domingensis</i> Family: <i>Typhaceae</i> (Bull-rush family) Native	Grows in swampy areas. Long strap leaves and flower spikes like a brown cigar on a long stem.	Food value is in the starchy roots which can be eaten raw or cooked.		Edges of permanent fresh or slightly brackish water. Moyne River at the Toolong North Road crossing.
Austral Seablite	<i>Suaeda australis</i> Family: <i>Chenopodiaceae</i> (Saltbush family) Native	Narrow-leaf upright shrub to about 30 cm tall, always on areas periodically inundated by sea water.	Salads and as a lightly cooked vegetable. Tastes a bit like young beans.		Areas periodically inundated by sea water like the area at the start of the Griffiths Island causeway and along the Moyne River banks.