



A Local Wetland Bushfood Garden

TIN Topic 6

I might kill two birds (Indian Mynas) with one stone in this article and outline some suitable local frog habitat plants as well, as there is quite an overlap with some of the wetland bushfood species providing excellent shelter for frogs.

It is of some concern that many of the exotic landscaping plants recommended as frog habitat species have become environmental weeds within our local wetlands: garden-escape plants such as Indian Ginger, Arum Lily, Black Stemmed Taro and Canna Lily can be found thriving in local wetland reserves, and some, like Water Hyacinth and Salvinia, have become Noxious Weeds.



As mentioned in an earlier article, The Replacement of Weed Species with Suitable Native Species, **for every weed on our sites, there is probably a native plant that will perform the same function and occupy the same niche**, so we aim to replace the exotic Elephant's Ears, Canna Lilly, Indian Ginger, Palm Grass and Giant Reed on the creek bank with natives, *Alocasia brisbanensis* / Elephant's Ear, *Crinum pedunculatum* / Stream Lily, *Alpinia caerulea* / Native Ginger, *Lomandra longifolia* / Mat Rush and *Dianella caerulea* / Flax Lily. These native plants would make excellent frog habitat plants for the edge of stream or pond zone, and the *Alocasia* and *Crinum* will even take occasional inundation.

Now for plants that fit the category of both bushfood and frog habitat. Many of the wetland plants, such as the Bungwall Fern (mentioned in the Rainforest Bushfood Garden), Cumbungi (or bulrushes), spike rushes, water ribbons, etc., would have provided the starchy tubers and shoots as staples in the Aboriginal peoples' diet, and these species are commonly represented in remnant wetland reserves and even in constructed wetlands on recently developed estates, Lakelands and Forest Hills for example.

***Typha* spp. - Cumbungi** The bulrush is extremely common locally, so much so that it is considered as a weed by stormwater maintenance crews. It grows prolifically in ponds and creeks, and is an extremely efficient sediment filter and nutrient extractor, as well as being habitat for frogs and wetland birds.



Alpinia caerulea
Native Ginger



Crinum pedunculatum
Stream Lily



Lomandra longifolia
Mat Rush

Detractors point to its invasiveness, and how quickly it will block up creeks and shallow dams, and lock themselves into an unsustainable maintenance regime of mechanical harvesting, often to the detriment of riparian plantings. **Wild Lime: Cooking from the bushfood garden** (in the LRO library) is however effusive in its praise of this plant, pointing out that all parts of the plant can be used as either fibre or food. 'The shoots are absolutely delicious... They can be prepared with a minimum of effort; steam until tender, and quickly refresh in ice-water if you wish to serve them cold, or toss them while they're hot in a little butter, native pepper and wild thyme.' It seems as though with a bit of imagination and lateral thinking, we could turn a plant that is considered a nuisance and maintenance nightmare into a valuable resource. Before you go out and eat all the Cumbungi in your local creek or pond (saving Council thousands of dollars in maintenance costs), remember the warning in the first Bushfood article about only eating food from an unpolluted source.



mmm Typha on Toast... available at your local waterway

Triglochin procera - Water Ribbons Again this plant is a prolific grower found in many of the local freshwater wetlands, and perhaps most easily seen on Ash Island from the tracks and boardwalks constructed by the **Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project** (The Ash Island Project site is well worth a visit if you haven't been there. There are Bushfood Gardens, Organic Vegetable and Permaculture Gardens, Rainforest and Wetland Rehabilitation sites, rotational beef farming/farm forestry sites and Riverwalks to explore. **Contact the Project Office on 4964 9308**) The tubers of the Water Ribbons are the edible part, either raw or roasted, and are often quite deep in the mud.



Triglochin procera Water Ribbons

Eleocharis spp. - Spike Rushes The most known spike rush as an edible species is *Eleocharis dulcis*- Chinese Water Chestnut, but this does not grow locally. Spike rushes grow in the shallow water on the edges of waterholes, dams and ponds, and again it is the starchy tuber that is harvested for food. Probably the best way to grow *Typha*, *Eleocharis* and *Triglochin* in a bush garden situation would be to plant each in separate containers in a nutrient-rich potting mix covered by gravel at the top to prevent muddying of the water, and then to immerse the containers in your pond or dam. This would overcome the tendency of any of the species to dominate the pond, and also make seasonal harvesting easier.

Marsilea spp. - Nardoo Although it looks nothing like it, this plant is actually a fern. Looking like an aquatic four-leafed clover, the flat leaves float on the water's surface. A starchy flour can be ground from the sporocarp or spore capsule of the plant, which can then be baked into a 'pancake'. According to Tim Low's **Wild Food Plants of Australia** (in the LRO library), 'Nardoo is infamous as the food on which Burke and Wills starved to death.' This is hardly a recommendation for inclusion in your bush tucker garden, but at least it would be a good floating shelter plant for frogs and tadpoles.



Anyone for Nardoo?

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