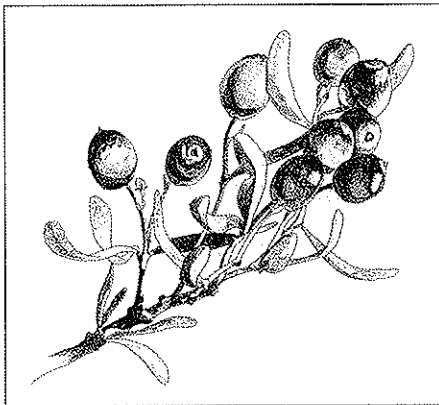


FLORA

Many WA plants produce edible fruits, and Aboriginal people used to move around their country collecting them at the appropriate season. Along the coast, one such plant is the wild grape (*Nitraria billardierei*).



This is a low, spreading shrub growing on coastal limestone or limey sands. It has oblong, fleshy, greyish-green leaves and is covered in starry white flowers in late spring. The fruits are purplish, like small grapes, with a large stone surrounded by juicy flesh having a light, slightly sweet taste. Very pleasant eating!

Back in January 1831, William Shenton and friends took a boat to explore south of Fremantle, anchoring one night at Mangles

WILD GRAPES - BUSH TUCKER

Trevor Walley

Bay. He wrote: "On the rocks we found growing on low bushes great quantities of a fruit resembling half ripe black grapes, we partook sparingly of them at first but finding no ill effects continued to eat them as they were rather agreeable in flavour, and with some we made an excellent pudding the next day".

The plant grows on the coast and islands from Carnarvon right around through South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and into Queensland. There is also an inland form, growing on natural salt lakes. In 1860, C. Wilhemi described its use as food in Victoria: "In December and January the bushes are so full of fruit, the natives lie down on their backs under them, strip off the fruit with both hands, and do not rise until the whole bush has been cleared of its load".

Unfortunately no Noongyar name for this plant has been recorded, although the existence of this summer lolly treat was certainly known. The name 'karambi' was recorded at Port Lincoln in South

Australia. The English name is wild grape, or sometimes nitre bush. This latter comes from the Latin word for saltpeter, 'nitrum', as the first-named species in the genus came from salt flats in Siberia.

Last January, a group of Noongyar elders visited Weedee



Budjar (Penguin Island) to look for bush tucker and the photo shows Shane Pickett on the boardwalk, indicating a bush absolutely covered in fruit. The next time you visit a limestone coastline in summer, see if you can find some wild grapes.

Trevor Walley is a Project Officer, DEC, Kensington. He can be contacted by email: trevor.walley@dec.wa.gov.au

Illustration by E. Rippey from 'Plants of the Perth Coast and Islands'.