

get true taste of australia

Bush food has great nutritional properties.

{ words Craig Squire
{ photography Nellie Pratt

There are over 3000 edible native plant foods in Australia, with about a third of these being found in the northern tropics. These foods consist of berries, nuts, seeds, leaves, fruits and roots and have provided wonderful organic nutrition to Aboriginal people. Sadly, some of these customs have been lost, often by force. For example it wasn't very long ago that the people of the Mossman area were forced from the newly declared national park rainforest into a mission and given food stamps to buy spam.

Talk about a shock to the system and no surprise that our Aboriginal people now (as a generalisation) have poor health.

Native food, or bush food as it has become known, has not had the best time in the Australian media. Often this is the result of the produce being poorly used in a restaurant or retail product. Mostly it is because of a lack of understanding on the part of the journalist and the public fascination with imported cuisines and food.

Now more than ever it is time both the media and public began to discover our local and native produce for not only its health aspects, but also its sustainability and low carbon impact. We have in our immediate area of Far North Queensland several native foods that are plentiful and have many applications teamed with local produce.

My favourite native food flavour is lemon myrtle – every home should have a tree. Not only does it taste great, it has anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties so is great for colds and flus. Lemon aspen is another excellent flavour source that is also rich in vitamin C and was traditionally used as a remedy for coughs and chest infections. It grows throughout the Wet Tropics and we source it from trees around the southern Tableland.



Craig Squire is the chef and director of Ochre Restaurant and Catering. View his recipes at www.ochrerestaurant.com.au/recipe.html



Chicken and green vegetable stir fry – egg noodles – lemon and honey sauce

This recipe is easy to cook at home and once the sauce base is made it takes about 20 minutes. It is truly local, using lemon aspen, honey, chicken and macadamia nuts from the Tableland.

For fluten free use rice noodles
Serves 4

Ingredients

4 skinless and boneless chicken breasts
100g green beans
4 bok choy
100g snow peas
1/4 small Chinese cabbage
1 bunch asparagus
80 g macadamia nuts
150g egg noodles
1 clove garlic – chopped
Coriander and shallots to garnish

Sauce

1 onion – chopped
80g lemon aspen – chopped
1L chicken stock
50g sugar
100ml honey

50ml lemon juice

Method – Sauce

Simmer all ingredients for 30 minutes. Thicken with potato starch (mix starch with a little water, then stir into simmering sauce until coating consistently) and strain.

Method – Stir fry

Cut chicken breast into wide strips. Cut bok choy, asparagus, snow peas, cabbage and beans. Blanch egg noodles, asparagus and beans. Toss chicken in sesame oil with a little garlic, do not colour. Add all greens and noodles with sauce. Stir to boil. Season.

To serve

Pour into bowl. Garnish with macadamia, coriander and shallot.



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Sweet chilli, tomato and lemon myrtle crab

This is an Ochre classic. This sauce is one of my best creations, based on a traditional Malay chilli crab. The infusion of lemon myrtle gives it a refreshing aroma. Crabs are quiet plentiful – you can even catch your own for authentic local food.

Gluten free
Serves 4

Ingredients - sauce

1 brown onion – sliced
2 red chillies – sliced
20g ginger – shredded
4 lemon myrtle leaves – shredded
1 clove garlic – crushed
Sweat above in 60ml vegetable oil

40g palm sugar
40g castor sugar
80ml rice wine vinegar
40g Thai soya chilli paste (or 30ml soya sauce and 20g chilli paste)
Add to above ingredients and simmer to melt sugars – approx 10 minutes

1 x 400g tin crushed tomatoes
4 fresh tomatoes – diced
2 star anise
20ml fish sauce
200ml water or fish stock

*Simmer all together for 30 mins.
Store or set aside*

Ingredients – crab

1 mud crab per person
Remove cap from crab, wash out gut and remove gills, chop crab in even quarters
For mud crab crack main part of claws lightly, try not to split apart

Method

Bring sauce to simmer in broad pot or wok, add crabs, allow sauce to coat, put lid on and lower heat to gentle simmer. Cook for 10 mins, turn over during cooking. Serve with rice, rolled up sleeves and napkins
Enjoy with a fresh pinot gris

Chef's Tip.

When cooked you should notice coagulated white cooked juices on the crab, this indicates the crab is cooked through. Use this concept with white fish as well.



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