The Gumbaynggirr people were lucky that their country was productive and food was plentiful. Rarely was there little to eat, although seasonal availability determined which plants and animals were collected and hunted, and how they were then prepared or cooked.

**Hunting**

The Garby Elders believe that animals should not be hunted or killed unless it is necessary as they have a great respect for life and never waste it. Bones collected from the Arrawarra midden suggest that they hunted a wide range of land animals including snake, wallaby, kangaroo, echidna, bush and marsupial rat, mouse and goanna. A large number of fish bones were also found; fish heads were notably absent, probably because these were used to burley the water in the fish traps.

**Collecting and Preparation**

It was the men of the Garby Elders who typically hunted and fished for large animals; women hunted smaller animals, fished and collected shellfish, and gathered roots, seeds, plants and berries. Women were also responsible for food preparation, using techniques such as peeling, pounding, soaking and roasting.

**Did you know?**

Saw sedge seeds are high in minerals such as potassium and magnesium. Although they are too hard to chew, they can be ground up to make a flour which can then be used to make what Garby Elder Uncle Milton Duroux calls ‘Johnny cakes’.

**Cooking**

Cooking on open coals is the process most commonly used for meat, where the whole...
animal is simply thrown into the fire, or covered with clay beforehand. Meat cooked this way is eaten immediately and is very juicy. Meat is also often cooked in a bush oven, where a fire is made in a pit; when it dies down, the meat is added, then coals are placed on top. All types of damper, as well as nuts, seeds and root vegetables, are cooked in hot ashes and are often wrapped in soaked paperbark. Meats, especially fish, can also be cooked on hot rocks placed around the fire; however, this often takes longer.

‘I ate old porcupine, he’s the best of all them, that porcupine, like the old people cook it, you know. You have to have patience to cook it. All night me old fella would be there alongside the fire; [he’d] lay there all night and watch it cook, lovely and brown. Mum used to cut it open to the gut part, [then we’d] dip the damper in the juice: beautiful.”

Uncle Bing Laurie

Although goanna is usually thrown straight onto a fire and cooked whole, reptile meat is also commonly wrapped in *Melaleuca* paper bark, which burns slowly, and then baked in an underground pit.

Fish is either caught using a hook and line cast from the rocks or beach, or by spearing those caught in the fish traps when the tide is low. One way to cook fish favoured by the Garby Elders is to wrap the fish in soaked paperbark with bush lemon and warrigal greens. This is then baked in the fire. The Garby Elders never ate sea turtle, as they are rare, and some people have the turtle as their totem.

“We try to reinforce society and culture. We get witchety grubs for the kids to try. Sometimes McDonalds might look better, but it is their culture.”

Uncle Tony Perkins

Lingo
badany: bush rat
biguurrri: hunt
buliin: wallaby
dungguuny: snake
garraam: net
gimung: mouse
maagun: feast
mujaay: echidna
wirriiga: goanna
yiila: cook

Garby Elders say that the *mujaay* is best eaten in wintertime because in summer the fat of the animal melts.