

For many generations, Gumbaynggirr people have been making use of the wide variety of trees growing within the region. Different parts of different trees, including the timber, branches, bark, leaves and roots, are used for a range of medicinal and practical purposes.



Coastal Banksia

The bottlebrush-shaped nectar-filled flowers of the banksia (*Banksia integrifolia*) give the tree one of its common names: 'honeysuckle banksia'. The flowers are collected and soaked in water to produce a sweet drink that is often used to soothe sore throats and treat head colds. When dry, the slow-burning seed pods can be used to keep a fire burning for long periods of time. The timber from banksia trees was occasionally used to build canoes (*baagu*).

bark was used as a medicine to clean up tropical ulcers. The soap was also used during fishing, when it was mixed into pools, causing fish to float to the surface. The young branches of the tree made useful spear throwers (*wamaarr*) as the wood is highly springy.

Did you know?

"It was one person's job to keep the fire going in camp, so they would use the banksia seeds to keep it burning."

Uncle Milton Duroux



◀ Photo

The red ash is also known as the soap tree; bark shavings and leaves can be made into a soapy substance with many uses.

Red Ash

The bark from the red ash (*Alphitonia excelsa*), *ganybaga*, or soap tree, can be cut from the tree, then soaked and agitated in water to produce a soapy substance. This gentle soap, often used to bathe young children, is believed to reduce nappy rash. For more serious skin infections, the inner

Broad-Leaved Paperbark

The broad-leaved paperbark (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*), or *balawun.ga*, is a precious resource that has been used for generations by the Gumbaynggirr people. The knobs on the tree are a good source of fresh water, the leaves contain aromatic, medicinal oils, and there are hundreds of uses for the bark which is both antiseptic and waterproof. Meats such as kangaroo or fish can also be wrapped in paperbark, tightly sealed using vine, and then cooked.

Creek Sandpaper Fig

The leaves of the creek sandpaper fig (*Ficus coronata*), or *gaagunyga*, are coarse

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and rough, and are the reason for the tree's name - they were used to polish wooden objects. The fruit of the creek sandpaper fig (*gaaguny*) can be peeled and eaten raw, straight from the tree. Sap from wounds in the tree was also used to treat skin infections. Creek sandpaper fig timber is easily burnt, so is often used to make fires. Finally, long bark-fibre strips taken from the tree can be used to make good quality string.



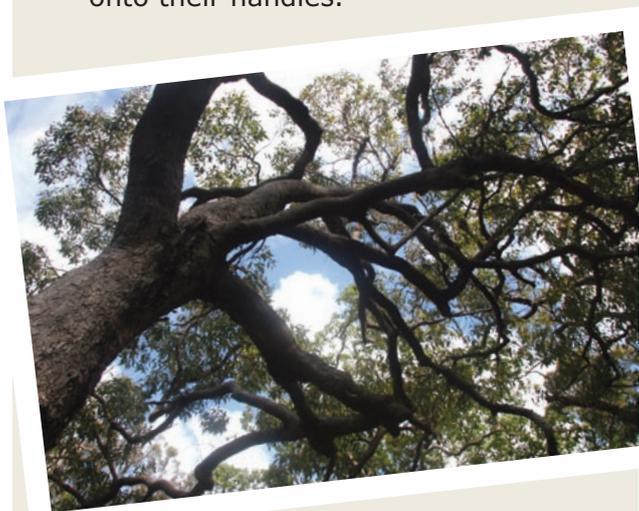
◀ Photo

The sap of the creek sandpaper fig has medicinal uses, and the rough leaves are used to polish wooden tools and artefacts.

Figs are very important to Gumbaynggirr people; there are nine lingo names for the fig that are still in use, and the Gumbaynggirr Language Centre at Bellwood is named *Muurrbay* or 'The White Fig'. Figs were often planted by Gumbaynggirr people to mark campsites, and many of these majestic trees still survive today, filled with memories.

Grass Tree

The grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea* spp.), or *garraan.gurr*, is a valuable resource for the Gumbaynggirr people. The flowers of the tree are full of nectar and, when soaked in water, produce a sweet drink. The flower shafts can be used to make fire by spinning one piece in another that has been split open, or crafted into fishing spears which are not only strong and light but also float, making them easier to retrieve. The resin of the base of the leaves and trunk can also be put to good use by gently heating and mixing it with fibre and beeswax. This produces an extremely strong glue, often used to fix barbs onto spears and stone axes onto their handles.



◀ Photo

For the Garby Elders, certain bloodwood trees are ceremonial. The sap-like kino is also customarily used on wounds.

Please note that all native flora (dead or alive) is protected in National Parks estate.

Photos: Adam Davey; Michael Rule.

Bloodwood

The bloodwood tree (*Corymbia* spp.) derives its name from the red sap-like kino that is often seen oozing from the bark. Bloodwood kino was commonly used for medicinal purposes, such as to stop bleeding during rituals.

▼ Photo

According to Garby Elder Uncle Milton Duroux, grass trees can be used like a bush compass: "When the flowers start opening on the spike [at the top of the shaft], the flowers to the north open first. It usually leans to the north, too, when it gets bigger and older and heavier."




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