

Aboriginal people have long relied on natural remedies for a variety of ailments, many of which are still used today. Health issues in the bush traditionally included burns, bites, eye infections, stomach upsets, toothache and headache, and injuries such as bruises, cuts and broken bones.



Please note that all native flora (dead or alive) is protected in National Parks estate, and that the following bush medicines should not be used unless you are with someone who is extremely knowledgeable about their application.



◀ Photo

Consumption of the small new leaves on the sarsaparilla vine is thought to help cleanse the blood and boost health.

Native Sarsaparilla

The young, red leaves of native sarsaparilla (*Smilax glycyphylla*) may be boiled to make a tea to relieve the symptoms of colds and flu. This sweet, tangy tea can also be used to treat pain caused by arthritis and diabetes. The young leaves can be eaten raw, straight from the vine, and are reputed to cleanse the blood. According to Garby Elder Uncle Milton Duroux, if you “have a tiny bit every day [...] it will clean your blood right out. [It also acts] like a tonic, so you can take it not only when you’re sick but all the time, to keep you healthy.”

Did you know?

The swamp lily can be crushed and rubbed onto stings from marine animals, such as the jellyfish and bluebottle, to ease the pain.

Grey Mangrove

The leaves and young shoots of the grey mangrove (*Avicennia marina*), or **baru-baruga**, were traditionally chewed and used on stingray stings. The bark can also be rubbed on stings, and the wood ash made into a paste to treat skin sores.

Broad-Leaved Paperbark

The leaves of the broad-leaved paperbark (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*), or **balawun.ga**, are considered to be effective in reducing hay fever and sinus infections as they can be crushed to release a vapour which is then inhaled. The aromatic oils freed by this process are similar to those of eucalypts and are therefore commonly used in the treatment of head colds. The leaves are also used in smoking ceremonies or rubbed onto the skin as an insect repellent.

Garby Elders refer to the broad-leaved paperbark as the ‘medicine tree’ as it has an extremely wide range of medicinal uses.

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The bark is particularly useful. A splint for broken bones can be made by taking a deep layer of bark, turning it inside out and binding it to the broken limb. When the bark dries, it sets hard. The bark is also useful for making baby carriers and allergy-free pillows, but care must be taken when collecting it as funnel web spiders often make their home in these rough-barked trees.



◀ Photo

Each branchlet or bunch of needles on *Casuarina equisetifolia* is said to resemble a horse's tail.

Horsetail She-oak

The astringent bark of the horsetail she-oak (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), or **wirriimbiga**, is traditionally used to treat diarrhoea. A painful hole in a tooth can be plugged with the inner bark, and a mouthwash can be made from young twigs soaked in fresh or saltwater.

Goat's Foot Vine or Beach Morning Glory

To heal sores and boils, it was customary for the Garby Elders to first apply bloodwood kino to the site. A bandage of boiled goat's foot vine (*Ipomoea pes-caprae*) was then applied as a poultice. Sections of vine could also be rubbed, bent and bruised, and then tied around the head to relieve headaches and migraines.



◀ Photo

Goat's foot vine can be crushed and wrapped around the head to relieve headaches.

Bloodwood

The kino from the bloodwood tree (*Corymbia intermedia*) is dark red and commonly used like a bandaid. The trunk of the tree is scarred with a knife to release fresh sap which is then smeared onto cuts to stop bleeding. Crystallised kino can also be used to heal cuts and reduce scarring.

Lingo

balawun.ga: broad-leaved paperbark
baru-baruga: grey mangrove
wirriimbiga: horsetail she-oak

"[The bloodwood is] a black fella's bandaid. You get the sap from where it is bleeding. You can smear the sap of this tree on your cuts and scars, and it helps heal and reduce scarring."
 Uncle Milton Duroux

▼ Photo

Due to its wide range of medicinal uses and properties, the Garby Elders refer to the paperbark as the 'medicine tree'.

