

# Establishing an Indigenous Garden In your school



## Introduction

Aborigines have lived in Australia for at least 50, 000 years. Over many generations Indigenous people have accumulated an extensive knowledge of the land, its animals and plants. These natural resources all possess specific uses or function such as food, medicine or tools which provide the Aborigines with everything required to live a healthy life. Within the last one hundred and fifty years, we have introduced many exotic plants and animals, heavily grazed and cultivated the land. Regrettably, this has altered the soil structure of most areas and has had negative implications on many indigenous plant species and animal communities where some have become locally under threat or extinct.



## What is an Indigenous Cultural Garden?

An Indigenous cultural garden is an area containing grasses, bushes, shrubs and plants that are Indigenous to the local area and that hold particular significance to the local Indigenous population. The garden could be established around existing vegetation that needs to be enhanced, in an old garden bed or could be placed in new planter boxes.

## Why Establish an Indigenous Cultural Garden?

An Indigenous cultural garden acts as a source of education and as a tribute to the traditional owners of the land. The establishing of an Indigenous cultural garden in your school will also help improve biodiversity as Indigenous plants attract Indigenous insects which in turn encourage Indigenous birds and mammals to the area.

## Suggested Plants for Your Indigenous Cultural Garden

It is important to acknowledge that the selection of plant species will depend on location. For instance, the requirements for a coastal plant may differ greatly to that of plants that grow in mountainous, high rainfall areas. It is also very important to realise that some plants may be unsuited for a school environment and care should be taken in choosing the right plants for your Indigenous garden. While there are many plants of cultural significance to choose from, the following are examples only.

### ***Yam Daisy (Murnong)***

The Yam Daisy provided one of the staple food sources in the Melbourne region though sadly was eaten nearly to extinction by European stock. A radish like tuber with a sweet coconut taste grows beneath the plant which was roasted before eating or ground into a starchy flour.



### ***Chocolate Lilly (Aboriginal name unknown)***

The Chocolate Lilly was one of many small lilies collected by Aboriginal people with growth being encouraged by the burning of grasslands. The flowers range from white to violet and have a beautiful chocolate fragrance. The tubers growing below the plant were dug and roasted before being eaten.



### ***Lomandra (Karawun)***

Lomandra is found in many different habitats from sand dunes to rainforests and is recognised by its tough strappy leaves and prickly cluster of flowers. The tough leaves were dried, split and braided to make bags and baskets. The plant also provided seeds which were ground into a flour to make cakes and the tender leaf bases, having a pea-like flavour, were eaten.



### ***Prickly Currant Bush (Morr)***

The Prickly Currant Bush is found in tall forests across much of Victoria often growing near streams. The plant produces small edible sweet fruits that ripen in summer.



### ***Hop Goodenia (Aboriginal name unknown)***

Hop Goodenia is a hardy green leafy shrub that grows abundantly amongst tall timber and is tolerant to periods of both drought and water logging. Traditionally the leaves were used as a mild sedative and have also been reported to have an anti-diabetic quality.



### **River Mint (Panaryle)**

River mint is a common species and is often marketed as a substitute for conventional mint. With a light spearmint flavour it was traditionally used as a flavouring in cooking and as a remedy for coughs, colds and stomach cramps.



### ***Native Raspberry (Aboriginal name unknown)***

The Native Raspberry is a small to medium shrub which prefers areas of high rainfall. It provides a delicious seasonal snack and is a potential substitute for aggressive European raspberries.



## A Case Study

As part of a biodiversity audit of the school grounds, students at (School TBA) discovered that while they had a high number of habitat trees and understorey structures, they did not have an area dedicated to plants that were culturally significant to the local indigenous people of the area.



*Students learning propagation techniques*

Students selected and propagated plants that were indigenous to the area creating a thriving indigenous cultural garden that acts as a source of education and as homage to the traditional custodians of the land.



## More Support & Information

Constructing and maintaining an Indigenous Cultural Garden is not quite as simple as it sounds and there are many issues that cannot be answered in a brief brochure. What plants are indigenous to my area? How were they important to Aboriginal people? How much water will the plants need?

Such questions are best answered with local knowledge. For further information and support please contact your nearest indigenous nursery. A list can be found via the link below:

<http://www.greeningaustralia.org.au/our-services/seed-and-nursery> **and click**  
'Victoria'