

Useful plants of the Regional Forests - Balmoral Section

320m loop, 15 minutes duration

The Regional Forests began life as the Habitat Gardens. They were created to display representative species from different habitats of this region in natural settings (regional ecosystems).

The Regional Forests certainly do this. Just look at how they have grown to what you see around you today!



The Regional Forests provide habitat for wildlife, shade and shelter for visitors. Individually the plants have a wide range of uses including edible fruits, traditional medicines, timber for housing and tools, and so much more.

Follow the loop pathway through this section of Regional Forests and look for the self guided walk stop signs coloured yellow for each stop.



This brochure has been compiled in partnership with Native Plants Queensland – SGAP Mackay. Photo credit: Pamela Finger.



1

Blue Flax-lily *Dianella caerulea*

Blue Flax-lily is a tufted perennial herb with fibrous roots growing up to 1.5m high by 1.5m wide. It has erect stems and strap-like leaves growing to 750mm long, with finely-toothed edges. The mid-vein on the underside of the leaf also has fine teeth.

Flowers and Fruits:

Star-shaped blue flowers are borne in showy sprays. The fruits are shiny blue, almost round berries measuring about 8-15mm in diameter. They contain several shiny black seeds.

Blue Flax-lilies grow in a variety of habitats including woodland and open forests, coastal forests and rainforests beside rivers and creeks.

Wildlife uses: The fruits are enjoyed by many bird species.

Human uses: The fruits can be eaten raw or cooked and have been made into jam. The leaves can be used to make a strong silky fibre for basket weaving. They make an attractive and hardy addition to any garden.



Dianella caerulea fruits

Useful plants of the Regional Forests

Queensland Cycad *Cycas media*

2

A palm-like plant growing to 6m high with separate male and female plants. The stiff, dark green compound leaves are spirally arranged. Leaflets reduce in size becoming thorn-like towards the base. New growth is hairy and the leaflets are coiled like watch-springs. Queensland Cycads are mostly found in woodland or open forest. It's a protected plant under the Nature Conservation Act.

Wildlife uses: Fruits are eaten by native rodents. Queensland Cycads are an attractive and hardy addition to any garden.

Human uses: Seeds were eaten by Traditional Custodians, only after lengthy and specific treatments and leaching of toxins.



Mackinlaya macrosciadea fruits

Mackinlaya

Mackinlaya macrosciadea

Mackinlaya is a shrub, usually single-stemmed growing about 2m high. Alternate, compound leaves have 5-7, palmately-arranged shiny green leaflets that often have toothed margins.

Flowers and Fruits:

Tiny greenish flowers are borne in clusters on umbrella-like, terminal sprays. Fruits are grey-blue, two-lobed drupes containing two white seeds. Mackinlaya are found in rainforests, rainforest margins and sometimes in open forests.

Wildlife uses: Fruits are eaten by Lorikeets and Fig Birds.

Human uses: Its lightweight wood is used in construction of baskets and fish-traps. Traditional Custodians only ate the seeds after very careful preparation as the fruits and seeds are poisonous. It is a very hardy plant, commonly planted in semi-shaded gardens.

4



Plectranthus diversus flowers

Native Coleus

Plectranthus diversus

Native Coleus is a square-stemmed, densely hairy, upright or sprawling sub-shrub usually growing 50cm high but sometimes higher. In favourable conditions, stems will take root wherever they touch the ground. The long-stemmed, grey-green, opposite simple leaves measure about 90mm long x 95mm wide. They are somewhat sticky and very aromatic when crushed.

Flowers:

Small, lobed dark blue flowers are borne on terminal sprays. This species of Native Coleus occurs in vine thickets, on rock outcrops and in open forests.

Wildlife uses:

Native bees and butterflies are attracted to the flowers.

Human uses:

Traditional Custodians used it as an insect deterrent when rubbed on the skin and as an antiseptic poultice applied to wounds.

5



Diploglottis obovata

**Wild Tamarind,
Blunt-leaved Tamarind**
Diploglottis obovata

This small to medium tree is often seen with an upright habit. The slender, grooved branchlets and new growth are densely covered with pale to rusty-brown hairs. The compound leaves have two to three pairs of almost opposite, short-stalked obovate to elliptic leaflets, measuring 55-150mm long, with prominent parallel veins on the underside.

Flowers and Fruits:

Numerous tiny white to cream flowers are borne in sprays. Fruits are yellow-orange, three-lobed, softly hairy capsules, 14-16mm long, containing one to three seeds that are surrounded with a dark orange aril. Wild Tamarind occurs in rainforests, primarily along rivers and creeks and only occurs in this bioregion.

Wildlife uses: Birds are attracted to the fleshy arils surrounding the seeds.

Human uses: The arils are edible and make an interesting tart flavour in fruit cakes. It is also an attractive addition for a larger garden.



Leaves of *Diploglottis obovata*



Alpinia caerulea fruits

6



Alpinia caerulea leaves

Native Ginger
Alpinia caerulea

Native Ginger is a tall short-creeping understory plant with cane-like stems growing 2m or more in height and with thick, fleshy underground stems (rhizomes). The large glossy green simple leaves measure about 400 x 75mm and may be reddish on the underside.

Flowers and Fruits:

Flowers are whitish, growing about 14mm long, borne on terminal sprays. Fruits are long-lasting blue globular capsules, about 10-15mm in diameter, containing numerous seeds covered in a thin whitish aril. Native Ginger occurs predominately in rainforests.

Wildlife uses: It is the food plant for the larval stages of the Banded Demon Butterfly, attracts native bees, fruit and nectar feeding birds.

Human uses: The tender young tips of roots are edible, making a tasty addition to salads and the aril around the seeds can also be eaten. The ginger-scented rhizome may be used, like other ginger roots, in savoury dishes, desserts, jams, marmalades, candies and tea. Traditionally, leaves were cut and used in thatch shelters and as food wrappings during cooking by Traditional Custodians. It is a useful accent plant for shady areas and makes an attractive container plant.

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Blue Quandong *Elaeocarpus grandis*

A large, tall tree with strongly buttressed trunk and slightly wrinkled, greyish bark. The crown is rather open with branches in whorls and foliage at the ends of the branches. The simple glossy dark green oblong-elliptic leaves measure 100-170mm long, have finely toothed margins and prominent pit-like domatia on the underside. They turn bright red before falling and there are usually some red leaves in the canopy - a useful aid for identification of the tree.

Flowers and Fruits:

Perfumed, greenish-white bell-shaped flowers, about five millimetres long, have fringed petals and are borne in sprays along the branches. Fruits are blue or purple, almost round drupes, measuring 20-30mm in diameter. They contain greenish flesh around one large deeply pitted stone. Blue Quandongs are found in rainforests, predominantly as emergent trees beside rivers and creeks.

Wildlife uses:

Fruits are eaten by a variety of birds and other wildlife.

Human uses:

The light-coloured soft-wood is easily worked. The timber is often used in flooring, furniture and boat planking. The thin layer of flesh is edible. The stones have been used to make necklaces and other decorations.



8



Spiny-headed Mat-rush *Lomandra longifolia*

Spiny-headed Mat-rush is a large clumping plant growing about 1m high with long, straight, relatively flat leaves. All *Lomandra* species have separate male and female plants.

Flowers and Fruits:

Sweetly perfumed clusters of tiny cream flowers with long spiny bracts are borne on 'spikes' almost as long as the leaves. The 'spikes' of male flowers are more conspicuous than those of female flowers. Female plants produce small greenish to brown capsules about 5mm long that contain three rice-like seeds. This species is widespread in a range of habitats, including along streams and watercourses and open forests in swampy areas.

Wildlife uses: Finches are known to build nests within the foliage. Pollinating beetles are attracted to the nectar in the flowers.

Human uses: It can be used for erosion control and to stabilise stream banks. The plants here were planted specifically to prevent severe erosion of the walking track caused by every heavy downpour of rain. Traditional Custodians used the leaves to make strong nets, baskets, mats and to bind wounds. The white leaf bases are edible with a flavour resembling green peas. It is an attractive and very hardy plant for gardens.



9

Elaeagnus triflora

Milla Milla Vine *Elaeagnus triflora*

Milla Milla Vine is a vigorous scrambler or branch-climber with shiny brown stems and twigs. The simple, alternate leaves are dark shiny green, sometimes dotted with a copper scale, on the upper surface and densely covered with silver or copper scales on the underside.

Flowers and Fruits:

Small cream flowers, measuring 4-9mm long, are borne in axillary clusters of one to three flowers. The fruits are orange or red drupes, measuring 10-20mm long x 12mm wide, dotted with copper scales. They contain one pale brown seed. Milla Milla Vine occurs in rainforest, especially on rainforest margins and beside rivers.

Wildlife uses: Fruits are eaten by birds and possums.

Human uses: It has tasty edible fruit that can be eaten raw. It can also be made into jams, preserves, and a refreshing drink. Traditional Custodians used stems for binding, framing for baskets and fish-traps.



Bark and trunk of
Eucalyptus raveretiana



10

Black Ironbox *Eucalyptus raveretiana*

Black Ironbox is a moderately large tree, growing 15 to 30m high. The trunk may be short or up to half the height of the tree. On older trees, almost black, scaly to tessellated thick bark persists on the trunk and sometimes on the largest branches. Above this the branches have a smooth grey to bluish-grey bark. It takes some years for this distinct bark to develop. The trees here have not as yet, reached this stage. The simple lanceolate leaves, measuring about 150 x 25mm, are bluish-green above and much paler below.

Flowers and Fruits:

Fluffy flowers are borne in showy terminal sprays. Fruits are tiny woody capsules and are probably the smallest fruits of all eucalypts. Black Ironbox is a Queensland endemic, that is restricted to riverbanks, creek banks and adjacent flats.

Wildlife uses: Local butterflies (Blue Tiger, Scarlet Jezebel, Clearwing and Red-bodied Swallowtail) and nectar feeding birds (Scarlet, Yellow, Honey and Brown Honeyeaters and Little Friarbirds) are attracted to the flowers.

Human uses: The dark timber is heavy and very durable, prized for benchtops and chopping boards, or as split pegs, which are used for nails in construction of machinery and buildings. A fast-growing ornamental tree, it is excellent for shade or as a windbreak.

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Weeping Paperbark, Long-leaved Paperbark *Melaleuca leucandendra*

A medium to tall tree, usually with a straight trunk and bright green weeping foliage. The trunk and branches are covered in layers of creamy-coloured paper-like bark. Simple, alternate leaves are thin leathery, short-stalked, widest below the middle and taper to the point.

Flowers and Fruits:

Nectar-rich, perfumed cream flowers are borne in open to fairly-dense spikes, growing just over 20mm wide and up to 150mm long. Fruits are small brown woody capsules that persist for varying periods which contain many fine seeds. Weeping Paperbark occurs in coastal swamps where it is often the dominant species, in coastal forests and along waterways.

Wildlife uses: Nectar feeding birds, bees, butterflies and flying foxes are attracted to the flowers.

Human uses: The strong, honey-coloured timber is durable in damp sites, was used for posts and was prized for benchtops and butchers' blocks. Traditional Custodians used the bark to make baskets and canoes, the leaves for medicinal uses, and a sweet drink can be made from the flowers.



Alexandra Palm *Archontophoenix alexandrae*

Alexandra Palms are a solitary palm growing up to 30m high. The trunk is marked with ringed scars from fallen leaves. Large compound leaves grow up to 450mm long and have numerous opposite leaflets that are green above and usually bluish-green below.

Flowers and Fruits: It has small, three-petalled flowers which are borne on huge, many branched inflorescence growing up to 800mm wide. They arise from the base of the crown shaft. The fruits are red drupes that contain one pale brown or greenish seed. Alexandra Palms occur in rainforests and swamps and are often a conspicuous emergent plant in rainforests along waterways.

Human uses: Some Traditional Custodians cooked the fruits, and the growing-tip of the palm is also edible. The leaves were used to wrap food for cooking. It is also a useful garden plant which provides a natural shady umbrella of foliage.



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13

Drynaria sparsisora

Coarse Basket Fern

Drynaria sparsisora

Coarse Basket Fern is a robust creeping fern with thick, often branched fleshy creeping rhizomes (modified horizontal stems), densely covered with dark scales. It has two types of fronds, the leaf-like parts of a fern. The lobed nest-fronds, up to 230mm long, start off green and become stiff and brown with age. The other fronds, up to 100mm long, are dark green, stiff, leathery, deeply lobed and have a winged stem. Sori containing spores, the tiny reproductive cells of ferns, are scattered on the underside of these fertile fronds. Coarse Basket Ferns occur in rainforests, pine forests, coastal forests and open woodland. It is often found scrambling through rocks and even climbing trees.

Wildlife uses: The fern provides shade and shelter to many small reptiles.

Human uses: Easily grown in a large basket in a coarse mix or as a ground cover in a shady garden.



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Xanthorrhoea latifolia

Forest Grass Tree

Xanthorrhoea latifolia subsp. *latifolia*

Grass Trees are iconic Australian plants that need little introduction. This species may be with or without a trunk which really is an aerial stem that may be up to 3m high, either single or branched, giving rise to up to four crowns. The bright green long and slender leaves are arranged in a grassy skirt on the upper part of the stem.

Flowers and Fruits:

Numerous tiny cream flowers surrounded by bracts, are borne on the upper third to half of the spear-like flower spikes that grow well above the grassy skirt. Three-valved, very sharply-pointed shiny black capsules, measuring about 15mm x 8mm, release up to three black seeds.

Grass Trees are protected under the Nature Conservation Act. They are quite slow-growing. All the Grass Trees here were salvaged from the path of road widening works, potted-up and donated to the Gardens. Forest Grass Trees can be found growing in sandy or gravelly soils on headlands, dune grasslands, woodlands and open forests.

Wildlife uses: Flowers attract many species of nectar feeding birds as well as numerous species of insects including butterflies that often almost cover the spikes.

Human uses: This is a very useful plant for Traditional Custodians. The white bases of the leaves were eaten raw as were the sweet nectar flowers and 'glue' was made from the resin the plant produces. Grubs found under dead trunks could be eaten and flower spikes were used to make spear handles. Seedling plants can make attractive rockery specimens for your garden.

To find out more about our local native plants, please contact Native Plants Queensland – Society of Growing Australian Plants, Mackay Branch on email npqmackay@gmail.com or phone Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens on (07) 4952 7300 or email botanic@mackay.qld.gov.au