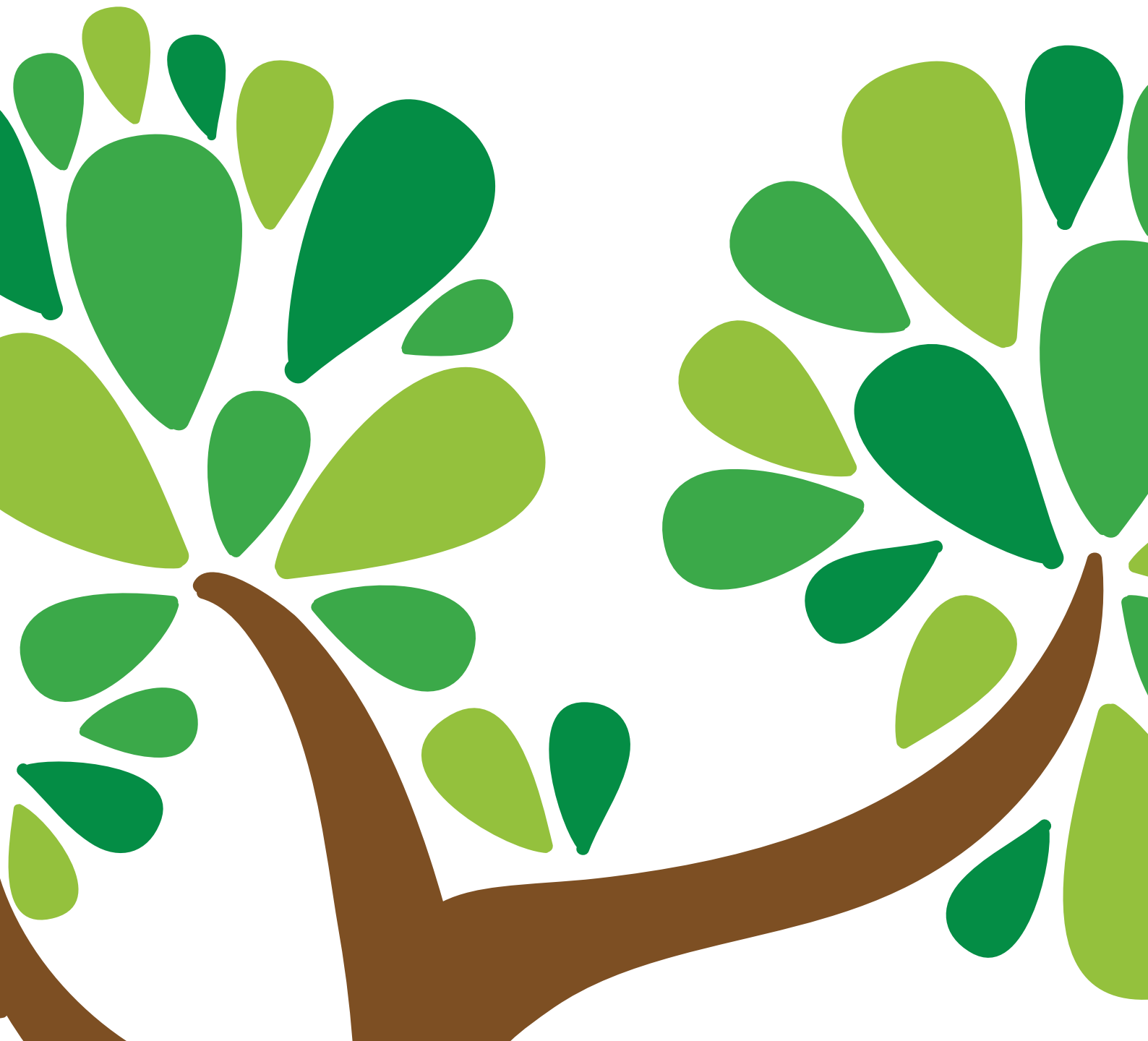




Therapeutic Uses of Common Backyard Trees and Plants





Australia has a deluge of gorgeous native plants that have medicinal properties. While indigenous knowledge utilises our country's plants, it's not commonly known that you can grow alternative medicines in your backyard. Until now. Presenting our 3 part series to help you plant smart and keep healthy. All the plants featured in this series can flourish in Australian backyards, and all have the potential to help you heal yourself holistically.



1. Tea tree

Its distinctive astringent scent gives you an idea of this plant's antiseptic properties. While the indigenous Australians were the first to be clever enough to use it as such, it's since become a staple in many a first aid kit and medicine cabinet as a natural antibacterial ointment.



Therapeutic benefits

In the 1920s, scientific experiments proved that the tea-tree oil was a far stronger antiseptic than anything used at the time. Nowadays tea tree oil is used for everything from acne to fungal skin infections.

Indigenous Australians have used the *Melaleuca viridiflora* tea tree variety for treating fevers, and the *Melaleuca* variety for treating coughs and colds. The **Bundjalung Aboriginal people** from the coast of New South Wales also crushed tea-tree leaves and applied the paste to wounds.



How to grow Australian tea trees

These plants are quite hardy, and once established they don't require too much care. When planting, avoid clay and hard-packed soils and go for something fast draining and loamy. You should also try to give your smaller trees about 3 to 6 feet or space, and large varieties around 15 to 20 feet.

Tea trees only require partial to full sunlight, and a weekly water during their growing phase. From the established phase onwards you will only need to water when it's very hot and dry out.



2. Goat's foot

This creeper plant will often bring to mind the ocean. It's common to see the signature purple flowers dominating coastal gardens and Australia's sandy coast fringes. The leathery leaves form a cleft shape almost like a goat's hoof, and come with contrastingly delicate funnelled flowers.



Therapeutic benefits

First Australians from Northern Australia and in some parts of New South Wales used goat's foot leaves to relieve pain from stingray and stonefish stings. Once crushed, the leaves were then heated and applied straight onto the affected skin.



How to grow goat's foot

Give yourself plenty of room, because this plant will not be contained. Goat's foot makes an excellent ground covering plant, and thrives even in sandy arid soil. Goat's foot does well even in dry areas, as it grows deep taproots that seek out its own water. It can handle all the harshness of oceanic conditions, including heat, salt and wind.



3. Aloe vera

This plant has been used for its medicinal properties since biblical times. There are a lot of ailments that can be soothed from having a pot or two of aloe vera about the house, including sunburn, cuts, rashes, and digestive issues. Aloe vera is even used as a beauty treatment sometimes.



Therapeutic benefits

Aloe vera sap is the part of the plant that contains the good stuff. This sap will speed up healing and reduce the risk of infections for various wounds, burns of all kinds, and inflamed skin conditions like eczema. You can also take the sap or aloe vera juice internally for treating ulcerative colitis, indigestion and chronic constipation.



How to grow aloe vera

Aloe vera is a succulent plant made up of 95% water, so any frosty cold environments will freeze it to death. Grow your aloe vera plants outside in warm climates – they love full sunshine or lightly shaded areas the most. They do well kept in their pots by a window; it's only advised to plant your aloe vera if you are in a place with consistently mild weather year round.



4. Echinacea

This daisy-like perennial plant provides lots of relief for colds, coughs and inflammations, as a general boost to the immune system. While native to North America, this no-nonsense plant can survive in a variety of climates, and doesn't need much water to flourish. It was once used by the Native Americans as an application for stings and bites from insects and snakes.



Therapeutic benefits

Taking echinacea is said to reduce the length and severity of the common cold, especially when you start taking it at the first sign of symptoms. The most common medicinal varieties are Echinacea purpurea, E. angustifolia and E. pallida.

Make your own echinacea medicine by finely chopping a few leaves and squeezing the pulp through a strainer to get a dose of about half a teaspoon. Adults are recommended to take about three doses per day, starting fresh each time. Please note that this medicine is not suitable for pregnant or breastfeeding women, children under two, those with allergies to the Asteraceae plant family, or those taking immunosuppressive medicines.



How to grow echinacea

The good news about planting echinacea is that it doesn't require much water at all - perfect for our changing climate. It grows well when planted in drifts in a low maintenance gravel garden, garden bed or field. It will also attract butterflies and bees to your garden.



5. Pawpaw

These tasty tropical fruits are not only a yummy treat in summer – they contain a huge amount of vitamins and antioxidants that can keep you at optimum health.



Therapeutic benefits

Pawpaw fruits are an **excellent source of antioxidants**, which have been shown to protect against chronic illnesses such as cancer and heart disease. They are also high in carotenes, and vitamins C and A.



How to grow pawpaw

You can easily grow your own pawpaw from the seeds of a fruit. Keep the seeds from a pawpaw you find particularly tasty, especially if it was also grown in your area.

As a tropical fruit, pawpaw are sensitive to frost, but this can be combated by choosing a sheltered spot for your pawpaw plants.

Once planted, you will need a mixture of males and females in order to pollinate the flowers that will lead to fruit. You'll probably want to thin the males, as only one male is necessary to fertilise up to eight female pawpaw trees. You can identify the male pawpaw trees by the long stems on their flowers.





6. Passionfruit

These evergreen vines bear delicious fruits in the warmer months. As well as being tasty, there are a swathe of health benefits that make passionfruit a great vine to add to your garden.



Therapeutic benefits

Passion Fruit contains alkaloids, which give a calming effect. There are also a host of strong antioxidants to keep your immune system uplifted. These trace goodies include b-carotenes, potassium, carotenoids, riboflavin and Cryptoxanthin- β .



How to grow passionfruit

Because passionfruit originate from warm areas, they flourish best in temperate to tropical warmth and full sun. It is possible to grow them in cooler areas, as long as the frost is kept at bay. Give them space for their deep roots and room to grow – balconies, wire fences and pergolas are all great locations.

You can get a grafted variety of passionfruit so that you don't have to worry about cross-pollination. Good ones include 'Golden Casket', 'Lacey', 'Purple Gold', 'Panama Red' and 'Panama Gold'. If you live in a cool climate 'Nelly Kelly' is a good one to try. Watch out for suckering though!

Passionfruit vines can easily fall victim to the woody passionfruit virus, so it's a good idea to start a new one every three years or so. It usually takes between 12 and 18 months for a vine to reach the size where they will bear fruit.

Finally, get the most out of your passionfruit vine with regular watering and pruning. Pruning lets the sunlight filter through the leaves to ripen your fruits to sweet perfection, and also controls the fast growth and encourage new growth.



7. Lemon balm

A shrub of lemon balm in your garden gives you a medicine for a variety of medical ailments, as well as the zesty aroma of mint and lemon.



Therapeutic benefits

Lemon balm can be used on the skin and eaten or brewed as a tea for different effects.

Crushed lemon balm leaves can be rubbed on the skin to keep mosquitos at bay and to treat insect bites and skin sores. It has also been used to fight fine lines and signs of aging for years, with the Queen of Hungary famously using it in the 1300s.

You can make a tea of your lemon balm leaves to help ease colds, fevers, and stomach upsets like indigestion. This diffusion is said to also have a **calming effect**, so many turn to lemon balm to ease the symptoms of depression, anxiety, insomnia and headaches.



How to grow lemon balm

Plant your lemon balm after the frosty season, ideally in a partially shaded area. Lemon balm likes rich soil, where you should aim for a pH of around 6 to 7.

If you pick and harvest your leaves often, adding fertilizer will help your lemon balm to live its best life. Slow release fertilisers or organic nutrients into the soil when planting will give your plant a boost.

If your lemon balm plant looks a little sorry for itself, cutting it back will encourage enthusiastic new growth.



8. Dill

This super herb is native to diverse regions around the world, including Russia, Africa and the Mediterranean. Luckily this means you can get it growing almost anywhere to enjoy both its fresh taste and health benefits.



Therapeutic benefits

A tangy addition to fish, pickles and salads, dill lets you eat your way to all natural better health.

Dill is **chemoprotective**, which means it can help to neutralise carcinogens. Dill is also super mineral-rich, containing lots of calcium for strong bones and reduced symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis. Other minerals that abound in dill include magnesium, iron, dietary fiber and manganese.

Historically, dill was revered in ancient Greek and Roman cultures for its many healing properties. **Hippocrates, the father of medicine**, wrote of dill's anti-bacterial properties in a recipe for cleaning the mouth. Ancient soldiers would also use burnt dill seeds on their wounds to avoid infection.



How to grow dill

It's best to plant your dill annually in a sunny spot. It will easily grow from seeds, but make sure you plant them close together so their wispy structure can support one another.

Dill can grow up to a meter tall; it's best to put it in the back of your veggie patch or herb garden so it doesn't block your access to other plants.



9. Finger limes

Finger limes are a rainforest delicacy. They come in a range of colours, from deep green to yellow, purple, pink and vivid red. When halved, these native Australian fruits reveal little pearls within. The distinctive lemon-lime flavour of their juice is a real treat, not to mention a wonderful alternative medicine.



Therapeutic benefits

Indigenous Australians have revered these fruits for years for their flavour and way they ward off disease. They contain high levels of folate, potassium, and have three times the Vitamin C of a mandarin. They are also rich in Vitamin E, which is known for increasing cell protection and warding off sickness.

The acidic juice and pulp and juice of finger limes can also be used as an antiseptic.



How to grow Australian finger limes

Finger lime trees grow to around 6 meters high. While they are native to the rainforests of south-east Queensland and north-east New South Wales, they will grow in a wide range of heavy soils as long as the climate is fairly temperate. Keep your finger lime tree feeling at home by mimicking the moist conditions of a rainforest, with fertilised soil every few months and soil conditioners every few weeks.



10. Turmeric

With medicinal and culinary use dating back to 2000 BC, turmeric is a bit of a wonder food.



Therapeutic benefits

Turmeric is extremely high in antioxidants, which assist your immune system in the fight against disease. It is also known for its soothing anti-inflammatory properties, which can help both arthritic inflammation and your digestive health.


Interestingly, turmeric has also been shown to promote a balanced mood in a double blind [medical study](#).



How to grow turmeric

Turmeric can only cope with warm conditions, so if you live somewhere that gets any colder than 18 degrees, unfortunately you won't be able to grow your own turmeric.

Plant a turmeric root cutting with several branches or fingers to it under around 2 inches of potting soil. Keep your soil damp but not sopping, and once you see sprouts it safe to transport your turmeric outdoors. Plant at least 30cm apart if you are going to put them outside. Otherwise you can keep turmeric indoors growing in a pot without any problem.



Ready to plant your powerful, medicinal plants?

We hope you've been inspired to check out your nearest nursery, and that you've learned something new about the healing properties of your local flora. Read on to find out even more about our native vegetation, and the healing benefits that so many of our backyard plants possess!



11. Quandongs

These Australian native peaches (*santalum acuminatum*), traditionally a significant food source for Indigenous Australians, are packed with a whole host of health benefits.



Therapeutic benefits

Quandongs contain twice the amount of **vitamin C in an orange**, as well as loads of vitamin E, folate, magnesium, calcium, iron and zinc. Due to their phenolic-based antioxidants, quandongs are preventative against illnesses like **cancer, cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's disease**.

The kernel contains a variety of complex oils that can be used to create antibacterial and anti-inflammatory pastes, whilst the leaves can be used for their Rutin-rich properties as an effective anti-aging remedy for the skin.



How to grow quandongs

Quandong trees grow in semi-arid regions in Australia and can tolerate high soil salinity levels. In the bush, these part parasitic trees will seek out a host plant or tree from which they rely on for their complete water requirements.

If you want to plant a quandong tree at home, remember that the seeds are incredibly hardy. Soak your seed for a few weeks and crack it open with a nutcracker for **faster germination**. Many people grow their quandong seedlings in tubes so that the deep roots have a chance to grow before you pot or plant.



12. Desert mushrooms

As vivid as the red centre of Australia, pycnoporus fungi, have been used as **medicinal mushrooms** by Indigenous Australians for thousands of years. The fruiting bodies of these fungi are a bright reddish-orange colour and are widespread on dead wood, making them hard to miss if you come across one!



Therapeutic benefits

Aboriginal people suck on the bright orange desert mushroom to treat **ulcers and soreness on the mouth and lips**. These mushrooms are also given to babies with oral thrush, and used as natural teething rings.



How to grow desert mushrooms

These mushrooms are usually foraged on dead trees in the bush, making them difficult to grow on your own.



13. St. John's wort

These star-shaped flowers (*hypericum perforatum*) bloom all over the world, and can help with an incredibly diverse range of health problems.



Therapeutic benefits

Most commonly, St. John's wort is used to **treat anxiety**, been known to treat symptoms of menopause such as heart palpitations and moodiness, premenstrual syndrome (PMS), attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

St. John's wort can also be used topically as an essential oil. The oil is a powerful **anti-inflammatory** and helps ease the aches and pains of **sciatica, sprains, burns, and fibrositis**.



How to grow St. John's wort

Plant a patch of this **perennial plant in early spring**, and it should last you years to come. St. John's wort likes a semi-shaded area with light sandy soil. Their roots have quite a wide spread, so be sure to give them spacing of about a foot. Harvest the flowers in late summer and keep them somewhere cool so you can dry them for later use. You can keep dried St. John's wort flowers and use them for up to a year - storing them in a jar or other airtight container will help retain their medicinal properties.



14. Licorice

This sweet root (*glycyrrhiza glabra*) is up to **50 times sweeter than sugar**. In fact, during the sugar rations of WWII, it was the only sweet treat available in Europe. Aside from being a healthier alternative to sugar, licorice root is also known to **aid digestion**.



Therapeutic benefits

The **active ingredient in licorice is glycyrrhiza**, which can be used to treat upset stomachs, gastritis, irritable bowel syndrome, heartburn and acid reflux. A cup of licorice tea after a meal has been a traditional aid to digestion for many years. Chilled licorice root tea is also a great refresher during heatstroke.



How to grow St. John's wort

Licorice is quite a **low maintenance perennial crop**. Best grown in sun (but can also tolerate part shade), liquorice can grow up to 1.5 metres and also has an extensive root system that will require around 1-3 metres of space.

The best conditions for licorice to thrive are temperate to subtropical areas. It's possible to grow it in tropical areas too, as long as the soil drains well. Licorice seed should be sown in spring or summer, however, root propagation is a more successful method of growing your own licorice.

Nice, rich soil will encourage the roots to spread, and whilst it can be harvested at any time of the year, it may take 2-3 years for the roots to reach the usable size of 1-5cm.

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