

Indigeneity and Authenticity. Vic Cherikoff and the beginning of an Australian bushfood cuisine.

November 2025

In 1988 at the Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy Vic Cherikoff delivered a paper *Bush Food and the True Australian Cuisine*.¹ In his paper he said:

I maintain that only a cuisine utilising indigenous produce can be truly Australian.
Vic Cherikoff 1988²

In 1989 Cherikoff published *The Bushfood Handbook. How to gather, grow, process & cook Australian wild foods*.³ In 1992 Vic Cherikoff published *Uniquely Australian. A wild food cookbook. The beginnings of an Australian bushfood cuisine*.⁴ This article reviews them as the first cookery books of Australian bush cuisine.

Vic Cherikoff and bushfood

In 1982 Cherikoff was hired by the Human Nutrition Unit of the University of Sydney to research the nutritional value of Australian wild foods.

Having access to over 450 different foods for analysis and able to nibble on thousands more gave me a unique insight into Australia's undiscovered, wild food (and medicine) resources. The fruits, tubers, vegetables, herbs, spices, seeds, nuts and more that I tasted instantly screamed at me that here was an industry waiting to be commercialised.... The foods came in from around the country, initially supplied by Aboriginal communities and my own collecting. In 1983, some of the left-overs (after analysis) were supplied to chefs and although I didn't recognize its potential impact at the time, the possibility of an Australian cuisine had begun.⁵

In 1987 Cherikoff acted on the commercial possibilities establishing Bush Tucker Supply.

Earlier published recipes for using native animals and plants

There had been recipes for native animals and plants before.

The earliest recipes for native plants as food I found were for Rosella Jam in 1869⁶ and for Quandong Jam in 1878.⁷ Mrs. Lance Rawson in her 1890 *Queensland Cookery and Poultry Book* has a recipe for Pigweed salad.⁸ In 1904 *The Sydney Morning Herald* published an extensive article on Edible Native Plants without recipes.⁹

¹ Cherikoff, Vic, *Bushfood and the True Australian Cuisine* Food In Festivity Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1988 pp. 37 – 39

² Cherikoff, Vic, *Bushfood and the True Australian Cuisine* Food In Festivity Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1988 p. 37

³ Cherikoff, Vic, *The Bushfood Handbook*, Bush Tucker Supply Australia Pty Ltd 1989

⁴ Cherikoff, Vic, *Uniquely Australian. A wild food cookbook*, Bush Tucker Supply Australia Pty Ltd 1992

⁵ cherikoff.net/history

⁶ To Make Rosella Jam, *The Queenslander* 15 May 1869 p.11

⁷ Answers to Correspondents *Australian Town and Country Journal* 19 October 1878 p.15

⁸ Rawson, Mrs. Lance, *Queensland Cookery and Poultry Book*, 1890 p.53

⁹ Edible Native Plants, the *Sydney Morning Herald* 6 July 1904 p. 4

Early recipes for animals had also been published. In 1888 the *Mildura Cultivator* published a recipe for Murray Cod Pie.¹⁰ Mrs. Lance Rawson in her 1890 *Queensland Cookery and Poultry Book* published a recipe for Parrot Soup.¹¹ Hannah Maclurcan in her 1898 *Mrs Maclurcan's Cookery Book. A collection of practical recipes specially suited for Australia* gave two recipes for Roast Wild Duck (recipe numbers 371 and 363) and one for Salme of Wild Duck (recipe number 369).¹²

Retrospectively, these dishes, isolated as they were, were precedents for Cherikoff's Australian bushfood cuisine.

The Bushfood Buffet¹³

Cherikoff, Jean-Paul Bruneteau, and Stephanie Dowling produced a *Bush Food Buffet* for attendees at Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy. Bruneteau and Dowling were operating *Rowntrees The Australian Restaurant*. Cherikoff was the proprietor of Bush Tucker Supply Pty (now Australian Functional Ingredients). The Buffet dishes were an example of Cherikoff's truly Australian cuisine. For example:

- 'Smoked Roo with Rosella Chutney - Kangaroo smoked with eucalyptus leaves and served with wild hibiscus chutney.'
- 'Wild Green Salad with warrigal greens, water lily stems, macadamia nuts, lemon aspen and assorted salad greens.'
- 'Wattle Pavlova – A traditional dish but using seeds from an edible wattle.'

The menu is Appendix 1.

The Bushfood Handbook. How to gather, grow, process & cook Australian wild foods

This was the first published cookery book of Australian bush cuisine.

There are 31 recipes for Australian bush cuisine ranging over all the dishes in common use: Davidson's Plum Dressing, through Wattle Ice Cream, to Witjuti Grub and Bunya-Bunya Nut Soup.

The chapter *A Taste From The Bush* detailed plants that grow there and describes their uses – e.g. Bracken, the Solanums, Water Plants - Shallow Swamp and Bog Plants, and Yams.

The book recognises the difficulty of bush foraging and has a chapter on Foraging In The City from street verges, parks, building surrounds, , shopping malls, churchyards, car parks and other public areas, now often landscaped (unintentionally) for the benefit of the urban forager – Wattle, Macadamia Nuts, Lillipillies, Midyim Berry, Bunya-Bunya Pine, Kurrajongs and Warrigal Greens. Each of these is given extensive notes describing them and their uses.

There is also a section on Creating Your Own Backyard Foraging Patch.

¹⁰ Murray Cod Pie, The Household, *Albury Banner Wodonga Express* 30 March 1883 p.18

¹¹ Rawson, Mrs. Lance, *Queensland Cookery and Poultry Book*, 1890 p.17

¹² Maclurcan, Hannah, *Mrs Maclurcan's Cookery Book. A collection of practical recipes specially suited for Australia*, George Robertson and Co, Melbourne, 1898

¹³ 4th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1988 unpaginated

Uniquely Australian. A wild food cookbook. The beginnings of an Australian bushfood cuisine

This book well advances recipes for cooking bushfood. There are 147 recipes ranging from Barramundi with muntharies, through Illawarra Plum Cheescake and rosella sauce, through Lamb loin with bunya nuts and warrigal greens to Native herb vinegars.

The Introduction gives a potted history of the development of bushfood cuisine and Cherikoff's part in this.

There are sections for different cooking sites. Bush cooking covers how best to use naked flame, coals, ashes, sand, and a ground oven with recipes – e.g. Beach camp crab soup. Home Cooking has recipes for Roo stew under a kurrajong crust, Corn, myrtle and lime soup among others. Fine dining with recipes for Moreton Bay bugs 'Eumundi' for example.

There is a Bush Glossary covering bushfoods used in the book. For example:

Appleberry or pudding fruit is a small forage food which has culinary application but is not yet produced in sufficient quantities for marketing. The appleberry is ripe when it softens and turns a pale yellow.¹⁴

A future for bushfoods

In a matter of years we are set to create and enshrine in culinary tradition, an authentic Australian cuisine. It will be based upon ingredients native to this country, integrated into a multicultural food framework and include some Aboriginal cooking methods modified for the commercial kitchen.¹⁵

That was Cherikoff in 1992. I have on my bookshelves 15 bushfood cookery books published over the last two decades. There are a dozen online sites for bushfood sellers. There are dozens of online recipes for bushfood. Bushfoods are at the multiculinary Australian table. It's taken a good 30 years but I think we can say that Cherikoff's Australian bushfood cuisine are well and truly here.

¹⁴ Cherikoff, Vic, *Uniquely Australian* 1992 p.89

¹⁵ Cherikoff, Vic, *Uniquely Australian* 1992 Preface

Appendix 1 Bush Food Buffet Menu

GRUBS AND RIBERRY

A relative of the desert witjuti
grub served with riberry from N.S.W.

YORK HAM WITH ILLAWARRA PLUM SAUCE

Wood smoked kangaroo served
with the blue Illawarra plum

SMOKED ROO WITH ROSELLA CHUTNEY

Kangaroo smoked with
Eucalyptus leaves and served
with wild hibiscus chutney

PEPPERED WATER BUFALO

Northern buffalo spiced with the
native Dorriggo pepper

WILD GREEN SALAD

with warrigal greens, water lily stems
macadamia nuts, lemon aspen and assorted
salad greens

SAMPHIRE SALAD

The mangrove saltbush

BURRAWANG BREAD

Made from the treated nut of
the prehistoric burrawang
served with King Island butter

STEWED QUANDONG

The native peach from
the outback

WATTLE PAVLOVA

A traditional dish but using
Seeds from an edible wattle

WATTLE

A beverage from
the second Australian food
plant commercialised