



# Warrigal spinach

## *Tetragonia tetragonoides*



**Common names:** Warrigal greens, New Zealand spinach, Botany Bay greens, warrigal cabbage.

**Distribution:** Warrigal spinach is found scattered throughout Australia and has become naturalised in many parts of the world. It is considered an agricultural weed in parts of Queensland.

**Description:** A prostrate, short-lived perennial sprawling plant with soft stems and leaves, spreading to around 2 metres across the ground. Leaves are oval or diamond or heart shaped and about 75–100 mm long. The small, greenish-yellow flowers appear at the leaf bases throughout most of the year. The plant is easily grown in moist, reasonably well-drained soils in sun or partial shade. It is, however, short-lived and needs to be regularly propagated. Propagation is carried out easily from both seed and cuttings.

Although edible, the leaves (like common English spinach) contain high levels of oxalic acid which must be leached out by blanching before eating. This should be done by plunging the leaves into boiling water for 3 minutes. The blanching water should then be discarded.

**Traditional uses/preparation:** Warrigal spinach was widely used as a spinach substitute in the early years of European settlement in Australia and was taken back to England where it became a popular green vegetable in the early 1800s. Looking for ways to fight scurvy, Captain Cook encouraged his men to eat warrigal spinach, and many seamen and convicts owed their lives to this little plant.

**Commercial use:** Available from some supermarkets and markets as a fresh green vegetable. The seeds are widely available for propagation from seed dealers and nurseries.



## Recipes for warrigal spinach

### Warrigal spinach and sea parsley pesto

From: <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/cookandchef/txt/s1778537.htm>



250 g warrigal spinach  
1 cup sea parsley leaves and stalk  
200 g macadamia nuts  
4 pieces of finger lime  
3 lemons, juiced  
3/4 cup parmesan, grated

250 ml olive oil  
Salt and pepper to taste  
4 cloves garlic  
Extra olive oil to store  
Sterile jar with airtight seal

Roughly chop the warrigal spinach and sea parsley, add the lemon juice and a little oil into a blender. Pulse to combine, add the macadamia nuts, pieces of finger lime and blend. Add more oil as required to help it blend smoothly. Add the parmesan and pulse to combine to desired consistency, season to taste. If using the pesto immediately, add a little more oil. If storing the pesto, leave it a little dry and put it into the sterilised jar. Let it settle to remove all air bubbles and cover with a layer of olive oil and seal. Store in the fridge.

*Some caution should be taken with warrigal spinach as the leaves contain oxalic acid, which can be harmful to some people if consumed in large quantities. To remove the oxalic acid, blanch the leaves in boiling water for 3 minutes or so, then rinse them in cold water before using them in your cooking.*

### Kangaroo tail (Italian style)

Adapted from: [http://www.sbs.com.au/food/recipe/195/Kangaroo\\_tail\\_\(Italian\\_style\)](http://www.sbs.com.au/food/recipe/195/Kangaroo_tail_(Italian_style))

2 large kangaroo tails, skinned and jointed  
4 litres of brown stock or water  
4 large onions  
3 cloves garlic, crushed  
6 cans of chopped tomatoes

50 g tomato paste  
3 tablespoons mixed herbs  
1/2 cup olive oil  
2 tablespoons sugar  
2 handfuls of warrigal spinach

Heat the oil and sauté the kangaroo tail pieces in batches until all the tail pieces have been browned. Remove from the pan. Fry the onion until soft, add the garlic and cook. Add the browned roo tail pieces, the stock, mixed herbs, tomato paste and the tomatoes. Season with the sugar, salt and pepper to taste. Slow cook for about 3 hours, keep an eye on the moisture levels, add water if required. One cooked, fork the meat and sauce away from the bones and discard bones.

Blanch warrigal spinach in boiling water for 3 minutes. Cook desired pasta (pappardelle is best) per directions. Serve the kangaroo tail sauce over the pasta and top with blanched warrigal spinach.

### Warrigal spinach pasta with soft boiled eggs and basil

From: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/recipes/2008/04/22/2224122.htm>

2 handfuls of warrigal spinach, blanched and drained  
250 g plain flour  
3 eggs  
1 pinch salt

1 egg per person  
2 leaves of fresh basil  
1 tablespoon butter per person  
Salt and pepper



Photo from Australian Egg Corporation Limited

Blend the blanched warrigal spinach with the eggs and combine this mix with the flour and salt. Knead for 5 minutes to a silky pasta dough. Roll out with a pasta machine to 1 mm thick and cut into strips about 2.5 cm wide. Cook the pasta for 3–5 minutes in boiling water, drain and rinse under cool water, reserve.

Soft boil 1 egg per person (4 minutes). Cool in cold water and gently peel so that yolk is not damaged (or poach the eggs). Heat the butter in a pan and toss the pasta until hot, season with salt and pepper and add the torn basil leaves. Place the pasta in bowls, top with eggs and tear each one so that the yolk runs out.