



Conkerberry

Carissa lanceolata

Central Australian Aboriginal names:

Alyawarr:	<i>anwekety</i>
Anmatyerr:	<i>anwekety, perlap</i>
Eastern Arrernte:	<i>aperlape</i>
Western Arrernte:	<i>irnekytye</i>
Pintupi:	<i>nganangu</i>
Warlpiri:	<i>kupurturru</i>



Common names: Conkerberry, conkleberry, bush plum, native currant

Distribution: The conkerberry is found in the open woodlands and stony locations of tropical areas in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. Although occurring mostly in humid areas, it has also been found to a limited extent in some desert areas of central Australia.

Description: An evergreen perennial woody tangled shrub up to 2 m high with straight, spreading spines 5–7 mm long. Flowering after rain, the fragrant white flowers give rise to green berries that change from red to black as they ripen. Although the fresh berries last only a few weeks on the bush, dried berries can be gathered from the ground and soaked to rehydrate them. The berry contains two small knobby seeds. The flesh is pleasantly sweet, but causes thirst if consumed in large quantities.

Traditional uses/preparation: A favoured food wherever found, dried fruit were collected for later use. The roots, leaves and bark have traditionally been used by Aboriginal people in the treatment of various conditions, including toothache, respiratory infections and the cleansing of sores.

In the Kimberley, some Aboriginal people burn the leaves as a mosquito repellent and squeeze the wood of the young plants to obtain a sap, which is rubbed into the skin for rheumatism.¹

The finely grained timber was also used for spear heads.

Commercial use: Research is being carried out into the antibacterial properties of extracts from the roots. Also the finely grained, bright orange timber is highly sought after by wood turners.

1: Isolation, identification and characterisation of antibacterial compounds from *Carissa lanceolata* R.Br. Root: Dhanushka Sugeeshwara Hettiarachchi, 2006.

Recipes for conkerberries

Conkerberry cordial

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- 2 cups sugar
- 4 cups water
- 4 cups conkerberries (or any berry)
- 2 teaspoons tartaric acid
- 2 lemons, juiced



Put the berries and lemon juice in a large pot, add water and bring to a rolling boil. Reduce to a bare simmer and cover for 10 minutes, or until berries lose their shape. Drain and strain through cheesecloth, squeezing out as much juice as possible from the seeds and skin. Allow to cool to room temperature. Measure quantity of juice. Wash out the pot and return the juice to the pot. Add 1 cup of sugar for every 2–3 cups of juice and add the tartaric acid. Return to the boil to dissolve sugar, then reduce heat to low and simmer for 10–20 minutes. Bottle while hot in sterile jars to ensure a tight cap seal.

Adult version: add 1 cup of vodka to 3–4 cups of the cooled cordial mixture. Allow the cordial to sit for at least 2 weeks before drinking. Keep in the refrigerator.

Rhubarb and conkerberry fool

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| 500 g rhubarb, washed and sliced in 1–2 cm pieces | 4 tablespoons orange juice |
| 1 cup conkerberries | 1 cup thick whipping cream |
| 1/2 cup blueberries | 1/4 cup sour cream |
| 3/4 cup raspberries | 2 tablespoons icing sugar |
| 1/3 cup strawberries | 1/2 teaspoon vanilla |
| 1/2 cup plus 1 teaspoon caster sugar | 6–8 almond biscotti |



In a saucepan over medium heat, combine the rhubarb, 1/2 orange juice and 1/4 cup of caster sugar. Bring to a simmer, reduce heat and cook, stirring, for about 5 minutes. Cover and continue to cook gently for another 5–10 minutes, until the rhubarb is very soft. Transfer to a bowl and chill.

In a saucepan, combine the conkerberries, blueberries, 1/2 cup raspberries, remaining orange juice and 1/4 cup caster sugar. Bring to a simmer and cook on low heat until the fruit is very soft and the sugar has dissolved. Push the fruit through a sieve to remove seeds and skin. Chill.

Roughly chop remaining raspberries and strawberries, sprinkle with 1 teaspoon of caster sugar and set aside for 10 minutes. Whip cream, sour cream, icing sugar and vanilla till stiff peaks form. Gently fold the strained berry mix through the whipped cream, to form a ripple effect. Serve in decorative glasses by layering with rhubarb, chopped berries then the cream fruit mix. Repeat until the glasses are full. Refrigerate until needed. Just before serving, top each glass with an almond biscotti.