



the spice of life

Photo: Donatella Parrini

Scott Foster first learned about native Australian spices 12 years ago, through his role as a Canberra restaurant owner. Now based at Lennox Head, he's created a whole new spice range, by blending native ingredients with complementary flavours. With colour-coded branding to help cooks match spice blends to suitable foods, Scott's RED (red meat blend) was one of two Australian Bush Spices' products to win a bronze medal at the 2008 Royal Sydney Fine Food Show. Here, Scott tells Coast Living why we should savour the flavours of the Aussie bush.

When did you first learn about native Australian bush spices?

"About 12 years ago, when I was running my own restaurant in Canberra, a lady came to the restaurant exhibiting a new range of individual spices available to the wholesale market. These spices were from the Australian bush and I fell in love with the unique flavours and aromas. The menu was changed to incorporate these

individual bush spices, combining them with a selection of Australian meats, the results of which were met with great enthusiasm.

I have continued to explore the range of native spices available since then, particularly that of the Far North Coast region and have combined 'individual' flavours and spices to create my own unique blends."

What inspired you to develop the bush spice blends when you moved to the north coast?

"My wife and I moved from Canberra to Byron Bay in 2006, lured by the bush local produce and the creative diversity of the people in the area. When we discovered we were about to add twins to our family, I decided to draw on my knowledge and love of the amazing array of

local native produce to provide a family-friendly career change. The change from Restaurant Manager to Australian Bush Spices owner has added some much needed flexibility to my hours and the satisfaction of building a business based on local resources."

How do you source the native ingredients and what steps are involved in producing the range?

"I source as much as possible from the local area. The Lemon Myrtle is grown locally and I harvest, dry and mill it myself. The fingerlime zest is grown in the region and produced by local company, Plying With Fire. The macadamias are grown locally by Cape Byron Macadamias.

The Akudjura (Bush Tomato) and Wattlesseed, however, grow only in an arid climate and are thus sourced from Central Australia. Once all the spices are ready, I hand blend and package the mixes.

My labels, to go on the spice tins, are all hand-applied using the services of Muffatak, a Lismore based disabilities support/business centre."

What are your favourite locally-grown native foods?

"My favourite local native food is the amazing fingerlime. This delicious fruit is native to the Northern Rivers part of Australia and when eaten fresh, the pulp is reminiscent of caviar. Fingerlimes have the delectably tangy taste of lime crossed with grapefruit. I use fingerlime skin in my BLUE seafood blend and also in WHITE, white meat blend – first drying and milling the skins to an aromatic citrus-flavoured powder.

Another local delicacy is the amazing macadamia. For me I love the versatility of this tasty nut, it works as a great accompaniment to the robust flavours of most Australian bush spices."

In general, can you outline what foods work well with native produce and spices?

"There is an amazing array of tastes and flavours available through our native herbs and berries.

When cooking with red or game meats a bold flavour is best sought. Mountain Pepperberry has an earthy peppery taste that blends perfectly with all styles of cooking meat. The fruity, peppery taste mellows as you heat to

become a unique robust taste.

Roasted Wattlesseed is another earthy flavour that has a strong nutty finish, great on a steak before you barbecue. It can also be used as a caffeine-free coffee substitute.

Bush Tomatoes or Akudjura have a distinctive sweet tart taste, they are best used dried in a roasting marinade or the whole berries tossed through a salad add another dimension.



White meats and seafood are better suited to more fragrant, fresh and zesty flavours.

Lemon myrtle has a strong lemony taste with strong aromatic qualities. It's great used fresh through a stir-fry or dried in a creamy sauce – a very distinctively Australian taste.

Fingerlimes, which taste similar to a grapefruit

crossed with a lime, are amazing on fresh or grilled fish."

Are you working on any new flavours or spices for your range?

"I am working on a range of sweet dried spices, jams, chutneys and oils."

What shelf-life can consumers expect from Australian Bush Spices?

"Packaged in fully sealed bags within light-blocked tins, the products have a 12-month shelf life and are perfect as a gift for anyone who loves to cook."

Have you noticed an increasing interest in native Australian flavours and products?

"Yes. Snally! The Aboriginal people have been using Australian native produce for culinary and medicinal purposes for tens of thousands of years, and yet the nutritional benefits and amazing flavours of these herbs, spices, fruits and berries are only now being embraced in modern society."

North coast residents can find Australian Bush Spice at Bongipost Post Office, Cetus Deli and Green Garage at Byron Bay, Howards Deli at South Lismore, Go Vita at Ballina or through the website: www.austrianbushspices.com.au