


Nature Notes

Junior Ranger

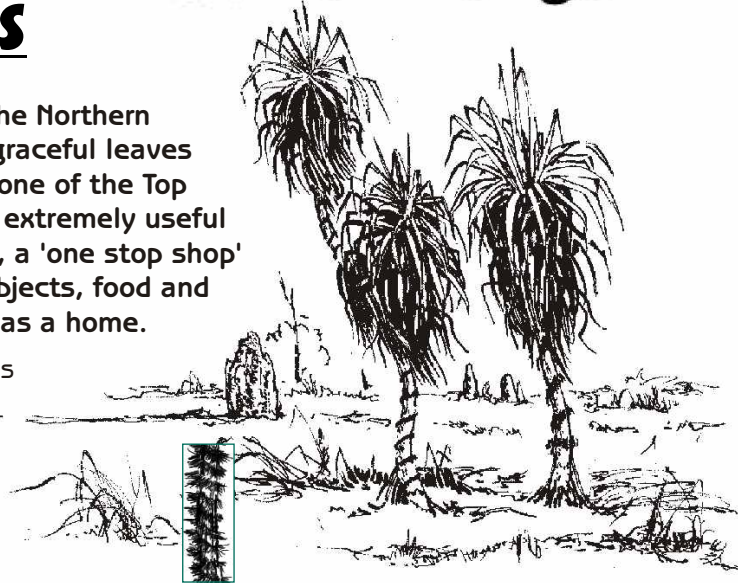
PANDANUS



Pandanus are a well known symbol of the Northern Territory. Their palm like appearance and graceful leaves give them tropical appeal, making them one of the Top End's most photographed plants. They are extremely useful and important plants for Aboriginal people, a 'one stop shop' with different parts being used for craft objects, food and medicine. Many animals also use them as a home.

Pandanus belong to a large group of similar plants, with 37 species (different kinds) found in Australia. They are generally confined to coastal regions. *Pandanus spiralis* is the most widespread and common in the Top End. It occurs wherever there is reliable monsoon rainfall.

Pandanus grow up to 10 metres tall. They constantly grow upward, producing new green leaves at the top. The old dead leaves stay attached to the trunk for some time looking like grass skirts that offer shelter to various creatures. Bird species such as Long-tailed Finches and Crimson Finches often nest in these protective layers of vegetation, whilst tree snakes hunt frogs and geckoes.



Pandanus spiralis gets its name from the spiral or corkscrew appearance of the leaves at the base of the trunk, that form as the plant grows.

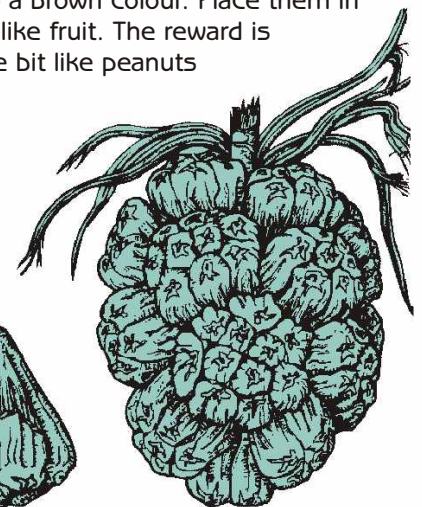
DID YOU KNOW?

- The name *Pandanus* was derived from the Malay name Panden, used on their own South East Asian species.
- There are over 17 different growth forms of *Pandanus spiralis* in the Northern Territory. They all have different growth habits such as having no branches, to huge spreading trees.

A TOUGH NUT TO CRACK

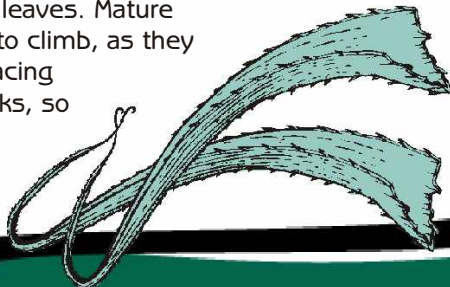
Pandanus spiralis produces tough fibrous fruit. Each cluster of fruit has about 10 to 25 individual nut-like fruits which each contain 7 to 10 seeds. Aboriginal people eat the fruit once they have ripened to a deep orange-red colour, but getting into the seed is another thing! If you want to try eating the seeds from inside the fruit, wait until they have changed to a brown colour. Place them in a vice and use a saw to gently cut into the nut-like fruit. The reward is worth it though; they're delicious, tasting a little bit like peanuts and coconut together.

The Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo and the Black-footed Tree Rat are some of the only wildlife that have what it takes to open the nuts. A powerful beak and long strong teeth are the tools of their trade.



OUCH !!

Pandanus come armed with spikes on three sides of their leaves. Mature trees are not good to climb, as they also have upward facing spikes on their trunks, so choose another sturdy tree when running from buffalo!



Northern Territory Government





UP IN FLAMES

Old, dry, dead leaves that build up on the Pandanus and on the ground below can turn them into living fire balls when bush fires occur. Once alight they quickly become a huge burning torch, hurling flames, smoke and burning material high into the air. This makes fire fighting difficult, as burning leaves can be carried for hundreds of metres, jumping roads, fire breaks and even rivers. Amazingly, the Pandanus often survive these hot fires!

To avoid having to re-light fires with rubbing sticks, Aboriginal people carried slow smouldering Pandanus branches to transfer fire from camp to camp when they travelled.



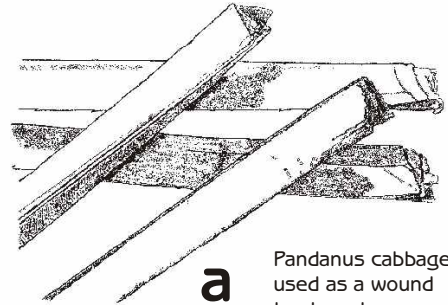
BON VOYAGE

Pandanus spiralis form large dense thickets from where their seeds fall. Some seeds are moved around by animals, but like most *Pandanus* species their seeds are able to float. Rivers and streams carry the seeds vast distances, even out to sea. They survive well on the land ward side of beach sand-dunes. However, their preferred habitat is on soil that doesn't drain very well, such as along the edge of flood-plains, rivers and streams.

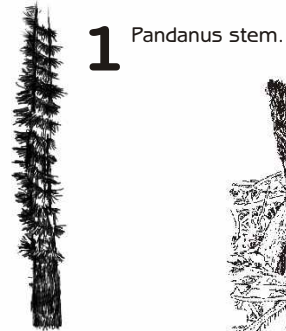
PUZZLE

A resourceful plant

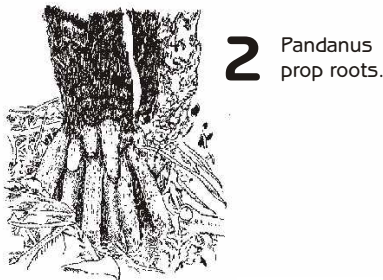
Aboriginal people found many uses for most parts of the *Pandanus spiralis* plant. Draw a line to match up the plant parts to the objects produced from them. Be careful though, some parts have more than one use. Have fun.



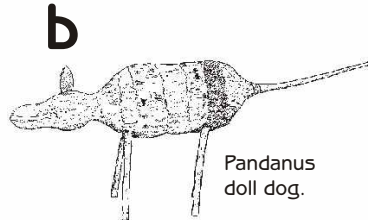
a Pandanus cabbage used as a wound treatment.



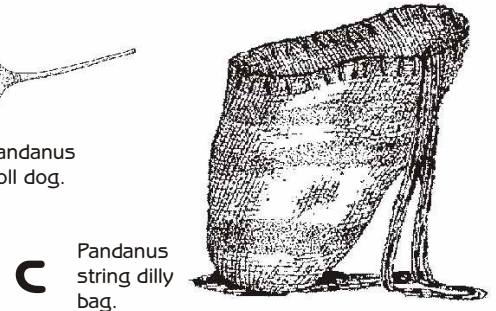
1 Pandanus stem.



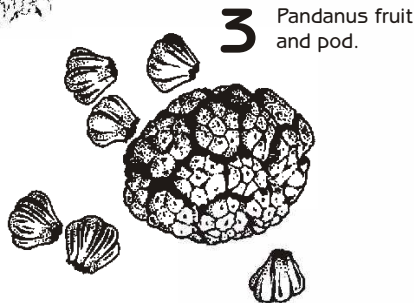
2 Pandanus prop roots.



b Pandanus doll dog.

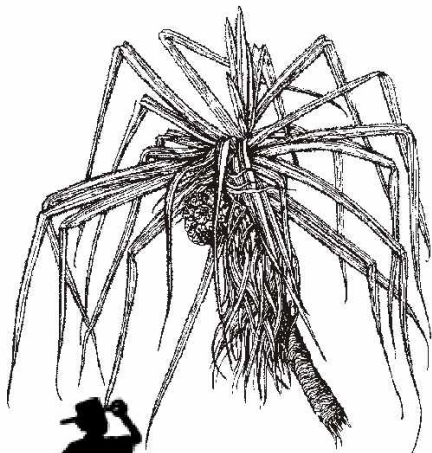


c Pandanus string dilly bag.

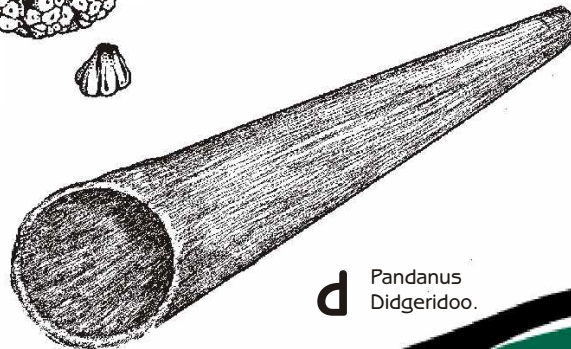


3 Pandanus fruit and pod.

e Dissected Pandanus fruit cut with saw, showing edible seeds.



4 Pandanus leaves.



d Pandanus Didgeridoo.

