

THE NUTRITIONAL COMPOSITION OF SEEDS AND NUTS EATEN
BY AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINALS

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The present study of 23 Australian native plant seeds and nuts forms part of an ongoing project designed to produce tables of composition of Australian Aboriginal bushfoods. Such data are needed in the work of dietitians, health workers, anthropologists and ethno-archeologists involved with or researching past and present Aboriginal groups.

Most foods were collected with the aid of Aboriginal informants as part of various separate research projects including the Bushfoods Programme of the Northern Territory Department of Health and that of J. Devitt, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Queensland. Non-Aboriginal collectors supplied and prepared a small number of samples. The methods of analysis and details of collection and transport are described in Brand et al. (1983). The mean (\pm SE) collected weight of the 23 foods was 163 ± 45 g. All analyses were conducted in duplicate.

The results indicate that seeds of several of the Acacia species and of Portulaca, Eragrostis and Brachychiton species assayed are strikingly nutrient-rich with high protein (range 17.0 - 25.0%) and fat content (1.1-24.7%) and similar to that of many leguminous seeds. The monkey nut (Hickseachia pinnatifolia), although a relative of the macadamia nut, is much lower in fat (3.0%). Pandanus nuts (P. spiralis) were high in protein (24.1%) and fat (49.0%). Grevillea leucopeteris seeds which taste like pumpkin seeds contained 29.7% fat and 1568 mg/ 100 g of Ca. Many of the seeds were rich sources of trace elements such as Fe, Zn and Cu.

Data such as these require confirmation with further analysis of the same foods but in the meantime provide a much needed guide.

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