

A step back in time brings a healthy future



Seeds of knowledge: The children from One Arm Point school north of Broome, Western Australia, learn how to grow their own food from scratch

Pictures: Andy Tyndall

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CHILDREN at the Djarindjin-Lombadina Aboriginal community, north of Broome, are turning their backs on junk food and embracing a new twist on more traditional fare, cooking up chilli con kangaroo and satay dugong as they learn the benefits of a healthy diet.

The children are preparing the tasty dishes using fruit and vegetables from a garden created at their Kimberley school to tackle nutritional problems synonymous with outback communities. The fresh food is being promoted as an alternative to the processed variety such as pies, frozen pizzas and soft drinks available at the community shop.

While some fruit and vegetables are normally trucked in from Broome, 200km to the south, they can be unaffordable or unavailable, especially in the wet season when a capsicum costs up to \$6.50.

The garden was set up last year with the support of the Eon Foundation, a group of three Perth businesswomen dedicated to improving opportunities for indigenous people, and is helping stave off type 2 diabetes and improve school attendance rates.

The children eat tomatoes, capsicum, broccoli, passionfruit and other garden produce for lunch. They cook it with kangaroo, or shellfish, dugong and turtle from the nearby Indian Ocean.

Aboriginal teaching assistant Lyn Howard said it was about changing the way children thought about food.

"The kids learn they can grow any sort of vegetable for themselves and their families," Ms Howard said. "They don't have to rely on the shop ... Eventually they are going to be adults, they are going to have children of their own and they'll be able to show their children what's good to eat."

The children prepare the rich, ochre-coloured pindan soil and grow the fruit

and vegetables from seed. "I talk about it with (my parents), about what's best for eating, about healthy food," said Sheliah Manado, 14.

The Djarindjin community now wants to make a much larger garden and eventually grow all its own fruit and vegetables. The school garden is also being expanded to include bush tucker.

Laurel Angus is one of the Aboriginal women who will teach the children about fruits such as gubinge, a small red berry high in vitamin C, and how to use the ash of ghost gum bark to ease tooth aches. "We are getting the food the way our ancestors did," she said.

The garden has attracted interest from other Kimberley and Pilbara communities and, half an hour up the road, One Arm Point's school is also starting its own garden.

Local Badi Jawi rangers such as Nathan Sampi will teach the children about bush plants. He said they were as important to Aborigines as fresh fruit and vegetables.



Tucker: Laurel Angus, right, collects seeds