Seasonal Calendars

All over Australia Indigenous Australians had their own yearly calendars. Just as the climate in Kakadu is very different from that of Melbourne, so the Wurundjeri had their own way of marking the changing seasons. The division of the year into four seasons comes from Northern Europe, and does not fit Melbourne. We still think of winter as unfavourable season for plants, but for our native plants, especially the small tuberous herbs, winter is a season of growth. At this time the bush is green and the temperatures are rarely low enough to stop growth. The unfavourable season is high summer when water is scarce and much of the ground flora dies off.

Documenting the calendars has informed the scientific understanding of the relationship between people and the seasonal availability. In the future the calendars may provide an important baseline for detecting ecological change associated with climate change. They have also had a positive social benefit by making Indigenous knowledge more accessible for students and the broader community.

The indigenous words used in this calendar come from the Kulin Nation languages and the season titles from the Gariwerd calendar.
1. Early Winter (April-May)

All sorts of fungi appeared with the rains while the ground was still warm. Bunjil the Eagle was building his nest, and the Brushtail and Ringtail Possums were mating. Bolin Bolin Billabong began to fill. Many different moths emerged and were food for birds and gliders. Eastern Grey Kangaroos, and Wallabies fed on new growth.

2. Deep Winter (June-mid July)

This cold time of the year slowed down but did not stop plant growth. Animals such as Echidnas were breeding, birds nesting. The flats near the rivers and creeks were often flooded and unsuitable for camping, so people moved to sheltered spots on the uplands where hunting was plentiful. Tuberous herbs and water plant roots are collected along with honey pots and native fruits. Fires were kept burning and they wrapped themselves in rugs made from possum skins.
3. **Early Spring (Mid July-August)**

As early as mid-July the Silver Wattle started to flower. Yellow Box also flowered providing much nectar. Early Nancy was the first of the small food plants to flower. People moved towards the lower lands as the temperatures rose, there they were able to snare ducks and other wild fowl. As the season advanced eggs were collected from a wide variety of birds nests.

4. **True Spring (September-October)**

This was a time of plenty. Lilies, Orchids and Murnong flowered and still provided root vegetables. Flowers were everywhere Wattles, Hops, Goodenia, Burgan and Kangaroo Apple. Snakes and lizards became active. Migrant birds - the Sacred Kingfisher for example returned from the north. Tadpoles appeared in rivers and ponds fed by melting snows from the mountains. This water flowed into the flood plains and replenished the billabongs. Nowadays the flooding is prevented. Water plants put on green leaves.
5. High Summer (November-January)

As the summer advanced, the land began to dry, and people congregated around reliable water sources, the creeks, rivers and billabongs. Fish were an important food at this time. Grasses flowered and fruits ripened - current bush, white elderberry, kangaroo apple and sweet LAAP (Manna) could be collected. With permission from the Bunurong clans, people went to the sea coast to swim and collect shellfish. Flounder and Flathead could be speared or netted in the shallows.

6. Late Summer (Feb-late March)

Hot, Humid and thunderstorms, grasslands have dried out and fire danger is high. Gums and Banksia come into blossom, providing nectar and attracting birds. March has been called Eel Season because female eels were observed moving down the streams to the sea. Mistletoe Berries were available and birds start to flock before heading north for winter, to be replaced with birds which will soon start to arrive from Tasmania.