




Pandanus fruit



Sunbird



Beach pandanus – Sunbird

flora & fauna 

The beach pandanus (*Pandanus tectorius*), or screw palm, occurs on foreshores exposed to the prevailing south-easterly winds along the Queensland coast, such as Alma and Rocky Bays. They often grow in colonies, and mature specimens provide welcome shade at the beach.

On Magnetic Island the beach pandanus grows up to 7m high and has a pale grey trunk. Aerial prop roots may be present at the base of the trunk. The leaves are sword-like and can be up to 2m in length, with spines down the edges of the leaf and along the midrib.

The leaves are generally crowded at the ends of the branches in spirals, hence the name 'screw palm'.

The pandanus has separate male and female flowers on different trees. A large red, 'pineapple-like' fruit that is made up of separate segments follows the inconspicuous flowers. On Magnetic Island another species of pandanus (*Pandanus cookii*) is found from the granite foothills to the sandy lowlands and along creek lines. It has sharper spines and often occurs in eucalypt and paperbark woodlands.

The burning of the 'grass skirt' and the silhouette of the pandanus are local cultural icons.

The pandanus provides important habitat for many smaller nectar eating and insectivorous birds. The sharp spines act as a barrier to the larger predatory birds. The tiny yellow-bellied sunbird, which forages and socialises in parties, can be seen feeding and playing in the spikey leaves of the pandanus. The helmeted friarbird and the black-faced cuckoo-shrike both take nectar and insects from the pandanus.

The sunbird builds a teardrop-shaped nest with a distinctive hood over the entrance, off a loop in a protected place – such as a tree or verandah – far away from the places where the birds usually feed and socialise.



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