

Boronia and Allied Genera

*Australian Native Plants Society (Australia) Inc. Boronia and Allied Genera
Study Group Newsletter*



Boronia Pinnata, Mount Victoria, October 2013

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Editorial

The intention in resurrecting the Boronia and Allied Genera Study Group was to provide a forum for more people to enjoy cultivating this beautiful genus of Australian Plants. It has become difficult to purchase many Boronia species in nurseries and many of those occasionally available are not suitable for growing in the local area. Many of these plants are purchased by people who do not understand their preferred cultivation conditions, so that when the plant soon dies they tell all their friends how hard boronias are to grow. This results in people not wanting to buy boronias so that nurserymen cease stocking them.

This systemic problem is likely to be difficult to correct. The previous leader told me she gave up because she was tired of running a cutting service for people who presumably could not purchase plants from nurseries. I certainly do not intend operating a cutting service. It seemed to me that the Australian Native Plants Society Study Group was the best place to commence addressing this problem. So where do we start?

We need a team of experienced enthusiasts to spread information more widely about the species and the cultivation conditions that allow boronias to thrive in their particular climate. The current membership of the Study Group consists of Regional Societies. This means that at least the Study Group has some members but for progress to be made we need individual members to commence a dialogue that provides useful information for other members to start growing Boronias or even talking about Boronias that grow naturally in particular places.

We are not seeking experts, although relevant expertise will not go astray! All we need are people who are interested in the Boronia species in the area where they live or have an interest in growing boronias. It would be useful to have any people interested in propagating species in any of the major cities or nearby as they could start supplying suitable plants. People offering to supply cultivars of Boronia Megastigma in the Eastern States need not apply!

This edition of the newsletter provides some information about cultivating a number of Boronia species under semi-natural conditions in a climate that may not be harsh but is certainly bracing. The issue also provides some context for Genera allied to Boronia.

It is my hope that by the next issue we will be able to include contributions from other members. A questionnaire is included in this issue for members wishing to contribute information about Boronias where they live.

Growing Boronias at Mount Victoria

By Doug and Di Coates

We have successfully grown a number of species of Boronia at Mt Victoria over the last thirty years. Some species have proved relatively easy to grow, some others have succeeded for a period of time and a few have shown limited persistence. This article describes which are which.

The location

Our property of one acre sits at just over one thousand metres above sea level sloping towards the south-west, the direction of the prevailing wind. It consists of dry sclerophyll woodland and some heathland with poor sandy soil typified by Eucalyptus Sclerophylla interspersed with some Eucalyptus Sieberi plus a variety of shrubby species and ground orchids and other bulbous plants. Summer maximum temperatures are similar to those recorded for Katoomba, being often amongst the lowest in the State with generally cool nights. Frosts are experienced in winter but temperatures rarely fall below – 2 °C. We receive about 10 cm of snow typically twice a year.

Retained species

The property is an enhanced native garden. The following species in addition to the eucalypts have been retained in significant numbers: Hakea Dactyloides, Banksia Spinulosa, Banksia Marginata, Casuarina Nana, Acacia Terminalis, Petrophile Pulchella, Epacris Microphylla, Isopogon Anethifolius, Grevillea Laurifolia, Phebalium Squamulosum, Microlaena

Stipoides and a variety of heath species. Natural mulch from the eucalypts and other sources has been allowed to accumulate.

Removed native species

Attempts had been made at clearing the land resulting in overpopulation by tea trees, often regrown from lignotubers. Literally hundreds of Leptospermum Brevipes, Leptospermum Trinervium, Leptospermum Juniperinum and gum seedlings were dug out. Significant amounts of Lepidosperma Limicola and Poa Sieberiana were also removed.

Introduced native species

We have experimented with many native species. Those introduced in significant numbers are Crowea Exalata and Crowea Saligna (these have hybridised and naturalised), Lambertia Formosa, Bauera Rubioides, Boronia (see below), Acacia, Grevillea and Prostanthera. Proteas have honorary native status.

Exotic species

On the boundaries we have grown a number of large Rhododendrons, Azaleas and Camellias. These provide a wonderful splash of colour in spring and attractive screens for the remainder of the year.

Growing Boronias

The conditions required for growing Boronia successfully were set out in Australian Plants Volume 21 No. 169 pp210-211 by John Knight, a former leader of the Boronia Study Group. In brief they are good drainage, consistent moisture and protection of roots from fluctuations in soil temperature.

We have endeavoured to achieve these conditions by growing Boronias amongst other plants and in the dappled shade provided by Eucalypts. Our soil is naturally free draining and the block slopes. We have tried to choose microclimates where moisture is provided by run-off from roofs and other places. There are four of these locations on our block which differ somewhat, but all have Eucalypt shade. We have used some supplementary watering in dry summer periods, but our experience has been that once established the plants are reasonably drought tolerant. This is evidenced by the facts that several of the species have survived in excess of twenty years and as the property is a weekender the plants are often untended for weeks on end. We do try to allow the accumulation of natural litter to protect the root zones from temperature fluctuations and hot moist conditions.

Whilst we have no evidence, we suspect the reputation of Boronias for being difficult to grow derives from attempting to grow them in open flat locations with poor drainage where they are exposed to hot moist conditions or excessively dry conditions. We have never worried about fertilisers but occasional use of slow release native fertilisers does no harm.



Boronia species, October 2013

Reliable species at Mt Victoria

Our favourite Boronia is *Boronia Fraseri* which produces attractive flowers in copious quantities, has a tidy growth habit and we have not lost a single plant in up to thirty years. Over this time one plant has grown to about 1.5 X 2.0 metres and has not been pruned.

Boronia Floribunda, *Boronia Mollis*, *Boronia Muelleri*, *Boronia Pinnata* and *Boronia Thujona*, have performed similarly but their growth habit is not as tidy as the *Fraseri*. *Floribunda* and *Pinnata* have particularly beautiful flowers, but viewed in retrospect why not grow the species that performs best (ie. *Fraseri*). In recent times I have found this species difficult to source in nurseries.

We have also had remarkable success with the West Australian species *Boronia Crenulata* which has a suckering habit and we have been able to transplant suckers to spread it around. In dry times it dies back somewhat only to come even stronger when provided with adequate moisture. The other West Australian species that grows well is *Boronia Denticulata* but we have not bothered

much with this species as it offers little advantage.



Boronia Crenulata, Mt Victoria, 2013

Boronias with limited life or availability

We believe that *Boronia Ledifolia* and *Boronia Microphylla* (local species) would grow well but have not been able to obtain plants of these species

Boronias with a limited life of several years that are attractive are *Boronia Serrulata* and *Boronia Heterophylla*. In particular *Serrulata* is very beautiful but requires more consistent moisture than the other species.

Boronia Megastigma

This is the species that is available in nurseries under a variety of often silly cultivar names (eg. Heaven Scent), all having the same distinctive perfume. We made several attempts to grow this species. One plant persisted for more than a season which was noted when we became aware of the perfume the following year. It is not really an attractive plant and we would not have otherwise noticed it. This is the species mainly responsible for giving Boronias a bad name and we would recommend that

you do not try to grow any of its cultivars unless you are looking for trouble.

It has been suggested that perhaps it is best grown as a pot or house plant in the way that *Cyclamen* are. It is usually sold in flower by which time the roots have become matted. These roots need to be cut and spread when planted, but even so it usually experiences root problems in similar fashion to many Western Australian plants that are not resistant to soil pathogens common in the Eastern States. It is just another “drop dead” Western Australian species.

Other Species of Boronia

There are a number of other species of *Boronia*. Some of these are insufficiently frost hardy to grow at Mount Victoria. Others offer no incentive in terms of attractiveness to warrant bothering with them and we have not tried to grow them. If you have conditions more or less suited to cultivating Boronias we believe that there are more than enough species discussed above to produce a beautiful display so long as you can obtain material from nurseries; and do not be persuaded to take any cultivar of *Boronia Megastigma*.

Genera allied to Boronia – What does this mean?

Boronia belong to the Rutaceae Family of plants, so that allied Genera might reasonably be considered to belong to this family. Worldwide this family consists of 160 Genera and 1000 species. In Australia there are 45 Genera and 320 Species. The Family is characterised by thin leaves having oil glands which provide Rutaceae species with often distinctive odours when the foliage is crushed. The species often also have sweetly perfumed flowers. They are mostly shrubs or trees frequenting warm and moist areas. The most widely recognised non-indigenous species are the citrus fruit trees such as oranges, lemons and limes.

Widely distributed Rutaceae Genera within Australia are Correa, Crowea, Eriostemon, Gerjena, Phebalium and Zieria. Euodia and Flindersia are common in parts of Eastern Australia and there are six species of Diplolaena in South-West Western Australia. One introduced species of Murraya is commonly grown in gardens in warm areas, having flowers with a similar perfume to orange blossom.

The Correa Genera is distinguished from most of the other genera by having bell-shaped flowers and Correa Species are often bird pollinated whereas all other species are insect pollinated. Correa is also distinguished within ANPSA by having its own Study Group.

So what Allied Genera might the Boronia and Allied Study Group be interested in? Crowea, in particular have similar growing requirements to Boronia, but flower in autumn rather than spring making Crowea a very good companion plant for Boronia. Eriostemon are an easy species to grow and will grow under similar conditions. Phebalium grow readily but seem to have shorter lives than the other mentioned species, possibly due to some sensitivity to root pathogens.

Ultimately, It depends on what members of the Study Group are interested in.

Questionnaire

Name:

e-mail address:

Postal Address:

Meteorological District (used for weather forecast/reporting):

Boronia Species:

- Native in your district
- Cultivated in gardens

Comments: (such as semi-shade, shaded, full sun; moisture levels; root protection; temperature range; maximum summer temperatures; winter frosts)

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