

# Boronia and Allied Genera

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

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## Growing Boronias

A couple of responses were received to the survey in the last newsletter. I look forward to receiving further responses from other States and locations.

Margaret Lee writes of growing *Boronia megastigma* on a commercial scale in the Adelaide Hills on the eastern slopes of Mount Lofty. The plants are growing in well drained loam over acid clay on an east facing slope and are sheltered from strong winds by an adjacent plantation of Waratah and surrounding *Eucalyptus obliqua*. The location reproduces the Mediterranean climate favoured by *B. megastigma* in its natural environment with winter rainfall of 600mm. Drip irrigation is used to prevent the soil drying out during long dry spells in summer. Drip irrigation is probably critical in plant survival avoiding excessive moisture whilst preventing desiccation as the location experiences maximum temperatures of 40 ° C and occasional frosts down to -5 ° C. Margaret is planning to grow another western species *B. heterophylla* which she has observed growing in the foothills south of Adelaide.

Jan Sked writes from south east Queensland that her garden is heavily shaded with poorly draining soil and is more suited to rainforest plants. Nevertheless, she has grown *B. rosmarinifolia* and *B. keysii* in pots. Jan reports that nine species of boronia grow within the Moreton District, bounded by Coolangatta, Noosa and Toowoomba. These are *B. anethifolia*, *B. falcifolia*, *B. occidentalis*, *B. parviflora*, *B. polygalifolia*, *B. rivularis* (rare), *B. rosmarinifolia*, *B. safrolifera*, *B. splendida* . Some of these species are reported in the literature to be distributed well beyond this area.

From the limited information available so far, it would appear that Boronia have evolved to suit specific climates such that different species grow in Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia. We look forward to reports from Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania.

## DIANA'S BATH and 'THAT' CROWEA

*Jan Sked.*

"Diana's Bath" - for twenty years that name had conjured up romantic visions for me. I had heard about it, seen it on maps, viewed photos of it, and once, almost reached it. Then, at long last, I finally managed to get there, and it was everything I ever imagined it to be. As we approached, I could almost believe that I detected a flash of white as the Goddess Diana departed in haste from this unwelcome intrusion into her private domain.

This beautiful expanse of blue-green water in Byron Creek is situated below the south-west face of Mt. Byron in the D'Aguiar Range about 60km north-west of Brisbane, Queensland. Flat rock surfaces extend into the pool on the western side, providing excellent sunbathing and picnicking areas. On the eastern side a smooth rock face rises out of deep water and up the mountain side.



creeks. One of the largest *C. viminalis* specimens I have ever seen was found here on Byron Creek. The eastern side of Byron Creek used to be within the Mt. Mee State Forest and the western side was on private property. However, this area has now been resumed by the Queensland Electricity Commission in preparation for a hydroelectric power station and dam.

Botanically, the area is very interesting and scenically it is quite beautiful. Vegetation in the area ranges from dry sclerophyll forest and heathland on the mountain slopes to moist gullies of rainforest species and *Callistemon viminalis* / *Casuarina cunninghamiana* communities along the It had a trunk diameter of about one metre!

After that first visit, I made many more back to this magic place, selecting the various seasons for my visits. So far I have 'discovered' 175 different species in the area. August and September are the best months to visit, as that is when most of the heath plants, the pea flowers and wattles are in flower. Discoveries have included 7 species of Acacia, 2 species of Banksia, 1 Boronia (*B. polygalifolia*), 3 Cissus spp., 9 Eucalyptus spp., 16 species of pea flowers (including 5 Pultenaea), 5 ground orchids, 11 Hibbertia spp., 5 Leptospermum spp., 11 Lomandra spp. and 6 members of the Ericaceae family.

The plant I have been particularly interested in had been classified originally as *Crowea saligna* from a collection by Government Botanist, Selwyn Everist, in 1963 in this same spot. It was also collected here again in 1984 by other botanists and later by myself on several occasions. In each instance, it was identified as *Crowea saligna*. However, I had become convinced that this was not a correct identification as, to my layman's eyes, the plants were markedly different. I had recently seen *Crowea exalata* for the first time and began to suspect that "our" *Crowea* could be another form of this species.

So, after some prompting from SGAP Queensland Region, the Queensland Herbarium asked me to collect some more specimens for them to examine. This I did on my next visit to Diana's Bath, scrambling up the side of the mountain to the small population that exists there. Specimens were quickly passed on to the Herbarium and Chief Botanist, Gordon Guymer, has since had a critical look at all the Diana's Bath material and decided that it matches *Crowea exalata* and, in particular, the specimen from Howell in northern NSW.

Our *C. exalata* is a small shrub, seldom more than 50cm high, with smooth stems, reddish on some plants, green on others. The foliage has a strong sarsaparilla smell when cut or even brushed against. It flowers in June with lovely, open, 5-petalled flowers that can be pink or white. In the garden it flowers for many months and has remained less than 50cm high and very compact.





**Pink form above – white form below**

An interesting feature that I found is that the pink and white flowered forms do not intergrade even when they grow together. You can tell which flower colour a plant has, even when they are not in flower, as the pink-flowered forms have reddish stems and the white-flowered forms have green stems. In later years I have found that the pink-flowered form also grows at the top of Mt. Byron in the State Forest, but I have not seen the white form at this higher altitude.

This is a beautiful plant and would be ideal for gardens, but has so far proven difficult to maintain, at least here in my particular area, Pine Rivers. I have had some success treating it as a container plant, although these are not long-lived. It will grow from cuttings and I have managed a couple of plants from seed.

## Allied Genera

### *Asterolasia*

During May I was contacted by the conservation botanist at the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney. He is interested in propagating some species of *Asterolasia*, which is one of the smaller and less known but attractive genera allied with *Boronia*. It has similarities in appearance to *Phebalium*.

The botanist is interested to know if any members of the study group have any experience or interest in the propagation of *Asterolasia*.

In the meantime he will contact John Knight, a former leader of this Study Group, who has written about the little known genus.

Jan Sked has also provided an interesting article that she wrote concerning "Diana's Bath and that *Crowea*". It is reproduced in this newsletter. My experience is that *crowea* is less demanding than *boronia* to grow and flowers prolifically over an extended period in autumn. I am told that the genera does not care for humidity although it is naturalised under Sydney red gums in the large grounds of a well-known school on the river at Lane Cove.

### **Purchasing Boronias**

I have found it difficult to purchase boronias in Sydney and my somewhat limited experience in Melbourne's Dandenongs has not been any better. What is offered is usually a very limited and changeable selection weighted towards Western Australian species which are more demanding to grow and mostly are inferior to Eastern Australian species that usually are in limited availability.

I have had phone calls from members requesting where boronia species may be purchased. I recently attended a local garden club where the owner of Sydney's largest native plant nursery gave an excellent talk about growing native plants. The nursery is being reorganised from three locations into a single large location at Heathcote. He did not mention boronias, but after the talk I took the opportunity to ask if he stocked any. His reply was that he stocked all the Eastern Australian boronias, although I think only at certain times of the year.

We need to appreciate that nurseries are endeavouring to run a commercially viable business. It is not just a question of stock holding times, but boronias are prone to excessive root growth in pots. If stock is held too long, the plant is likely to perform poorly when transplanted so it is always wise to check the root mass prior to purchase. The best time to plant boronias (like most other species) is autumn as less attention to soil moisture levels is required, which is one of the important criteria for growing boronias. This allows for roots to grow well and spread before the plant endures its first summer. However, the experience of nurserymen is that people are attracted to buy what is in flower so that boronias are generally available in spring. This means paying careful attention to soil moisture levels during the first summer, remembering not to overwater particularly in hot weather. A good quality mulch is critical such as coarse gravel or freely draining organic material. Boronias also like to get their roots under rocks, logs, tree shade or whatever provides a cool root system.

It would be useful to have some feedback from other members on their experience in purchasing boronias.