

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS Inc.

## EPACRIS STUDY GROUP

Group Leader: Gwen Elliot, P.O. Box 655 Heathmont Vic. 3135

### NEWSLETTER

**No. 11**

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**March 2001**

Greetings to all EPACRIS STUDY GROUP members. I trust you had an enjoyable Christmas and New Year holiday period.

One very welcome gift which now occupies a special place in our home is a delightful plate, issued by Australian Fine China with the pink flowers of *Epacris impressa* circling the rim. The *Epacris* design is the work of artist Phillipa Nikulinsky of Western Australia, and a donation from the sale of each plate is made to the Species Survival Trust, for work associated with the preservation of Australia's endangered plant species. Apart from the *Epacris* plate, there are coffee mugs and other items available, in a range which includes each Australian State Flower.

Our recent summer has included some of the driest and hottest weather for several years in many regions of Australia, although some areas have had heavy rain and flooding. Many plants have suffered from dryness including *Epacris* and closely related plants. Their very fine roots can dry out readily, so it is important to maintain moisture in the soil and to reduce soil temperature by mulching garden beds. Alternatively *Epacris* appreciate a position in the garden which is protected from hot direct sunshine by building, fences or other structures. Plants can also be grown in containers and moved to a sheltered location during the very hot summer months.

Container cultivation is included as a special Profile Page in this Newsletter. It is very obvious that we have only just touched the surface of the information that is around on the growing of *Epacris* in containers, so we look forward to being able to further expand on this topic in the future, with the help of Study Group members and others.

Those who have a computer and are familiar with checking out items on web sites will be interested to learn that Brian Walters has gathered together information on *Epacris* which is to be available via ASGAP on <http://farrer/csu/edu/au/ASGAP/epacris.html>

I'm yet to get into 'surfing the web' but it is something I really hope to do - time permitting! It's a good task for a wet day! Undoubtedly autumn and winter will come and I hope that your gardens survive in the meantime.

With greetings,  
Gwen E.

## NEWS AND NOTES

### Welcome to our only Study Group member in South Australia

A big welcome to Allen Russell of Enfield SA, who as our heading indicates, is our only member from South Australia. Allen is in the northern suburbs of Adelaide where the soil has a pH of 8.5. Alkaline soils can be very challenging to the home gardener, particularly when plants from areas with a lower pH are being grown.

Allen has a raised garden bed and has been moderately successful with *Epacris longiflora*. Two plants of *E. impressa* are surviving but with only very little flowering. As a trial, he has planted another - in a 300mm plastic pot sunk into the ground. We certainly look forward to hearing the results of this trial.

Have any other Study Group members tried this method of cultivation ?  
If so, please let us know your results. If not, perhaps it is something you might like to try.

### Growing Epacris further afield

To date our Study Group membership has come primarily from eastern Australia, with members in Qld, NSW, Vic and Tas, plus Jeff Irons in England and Mary Sue Ittner in California USA.

In some ways this is not surprising, as *Epacris* is confined mainly to eastern Australia in its natural occurrence, with *Epacris impressa* the only species which is also found in South Australia.

This does NOT of course mean that *Epacris* cannot be grown in South Australia, Western Australia, Northern Territory or further afield and any information on the cultivation of *Epacris* in these areas will certainly be of interest to us all.

### Thanks from Faye,

A lovely card was received from Faye Candy, expressing her thanks for our Newsletters during 2000. Our *Epacris* Study Group Newsletters are YOUR Newsletters, and the result of contributions sent in by members, so Faye's thanks are passed on to all who sent in items or snippets during the year.

### Twelve Epacris in a Tasmanian garden,

Jennie Lawrence lives in Burnie Tas. The only Epacridaceae plant she currently has in a container is *Prionotes* but she has sent in the following details of *Epacris* which are growing in her garden - in mid November 2000.

<i>Epacris barbata</i>	Has just flowered for the first time.
<i>Epacris breviflora</i>	2m tall. Flowers profusely
<i>Epacris gunnii</i>	Double-flowered form. Very healthy, not flowering yet.
<i>Epacris lanuginosa</i>	Looking dry. Not flowering yet
<i>Epacris marginata</i>	In bud right now.
<i>Epacris microphylla</i>	Two plants, not flowering yet
<i>Epacris mucronulata</i>	Flowered profusely
<i>Epacris myrtifolia</i>	Had some flowers
<i>Epacris paludosa</i>	Has had some flowers
<i>Epacris petrophila</i>	Still no flowers after several years
<i>Epacris reclinata</i>	Very healthy, flowered well.

Have other members found *E. petrophila* slow to flower? Have you done anything to encourage plants to flower ? Maybe talking to them, or even threatening them ? We're sure Jennie would like to know - and so would we all!

### More information on Australian Epacris

Bill Payne, Managing Editor of AUSTRALIAN PLANTS is also planning to feature *Epacris* in the June 2001 edition of this magazine, while related genera will be included in other forthcoming issues.

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ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS Inc.  
EPACRIS STUDY GROUP Plant profile

***Epacris breviflora* Stapf**  
**Drumstick Heath**



Illustration  
by  
Epacris  
Study Group  
member  
Bill Gunn



Photograph  
© Rodger Elliot  
*E. breviflora* -  
Cabramurra selection

*Epacris breviflora* Stapf

*breviflora* = with short flowers  
Common name - Drumstick Heath  
Distribution - Qld, NSW, Vic.

*Epacris breviflora* is an upright shrub of 1m - 2.5m tall by 50cm - 2m across.  
The leaves are to 1.5cm long by to 2-8mm wide and are broadly ovate ending in a pointed tip. They have a prominent midrib and the margin has minute teeth.

The main flowering time is in spring to summer, with sporadic flowering at other times. Small white flowers are produced in leafy spikes at the branchlet tips. The flowers can be profuse and very showy. They are sweetly scented, about 1 cm long and with spreading lobes to about 1 cm across.

The fruit is a small capsule which splits when ripe to release the very fine seeds.

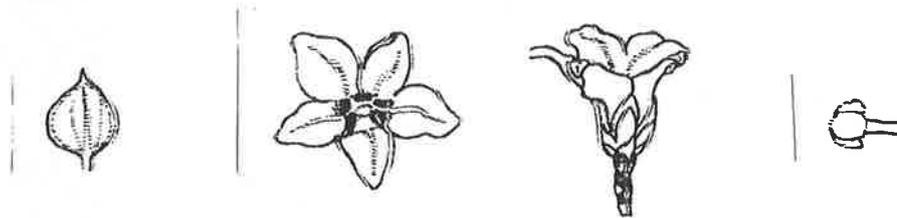
## ***Epacris breviflora*** Stapf

### Drumstick Heath

#### Natural Habitat

*Epacris breviflora* occurs in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. It grows mainly in moist situations, often beside streams, in sheltered rock crevices, and also in swampy areas and in subalpine sphagnum bogs. It likes a position with partial or filtered sun.

*Epacris* species 'Cabramurra' is a selection of *E. breviflora* from the Cabramurra region of New South Wales.



Underside of leaf

Flowers

Ovary style &amp; stigma

Illustrations of Cabramurra selection by Alice Talbot, from EPACRIS booklet, published by S.G.A.P. Maroondah Vic, 1977

#### Cultivation

*Epacris breviflora* has been cultivated by enthusiasts for over 30 years, but is still not widely grown. It is suitable for cultivation in gardens or containers, and Epacris Study Group member, John Emms of Loch Vic, describes it as a "first class pot plant". It prefers soils with a high organic content which are moisture-retaining but still relatively freely draining. A sheltered situation is important unless plants are being grown in cool climatic regions. Plants are frost and snow tolerant. Pruning after flowering encourages bushy growth.

#### Propagation

Propagation of *Epacris breviflora* is mainly undertaken from cuttings (see Newsletter No. 8). Seed can be used if available and it may be a good species to try using Jeff Irons' method of sowing the seed in a bed of moist moss, as also outlined in Newsletter No. 8.

### *Epacris breviflora* Stapf

*Epacris breviflora* was originally described by the German botanist, Otto Stapf (1857 - 1933). He was also responsible for the naming of *Epacris bawbawensis* (syn. *E. paludosa* R. Br.), and *E. stuartii*.

Otto Stapf studied at the University of Wien (Vienna), then subsequently went to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in England and from 1909 to 1922 was keeper of the herbarium. He was botanical secretary of the Linnean Society from 1908 - 1916 and following his retirement at Kew he edited the *Botanical Magazine* from 1922 to 1933. He died in 1933 while on a summer trip to Austria.

This space is for your own comments on the Propagation and Cultivation of *Epacris breviflora* - Drumstick Heath

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS Inc.  
EPACRIS STUDY GROUP

## Special PROFILE TOPIC

# The CULTIVATION of *Epacris* in CONTAINERS

Much of the information contained in our Newsletters relates to the cultivation of *Epacris* in garden conditions. There are however many members who are restricted to growing plants in containers - or who choose to use this method of cultivation.

### WHY GROW *Epacris* IN CONTAINERS ?

Container cultivation can be useful for a variety of reasons -

- We may not have the space for a regular garden.
  - We may find container-gardening physically easier than in-ground planting.
  - Tubs or hanging baskets can be useful in paved courtyards or similar areas.
  - Container-cultivation allows us to bring a plant to a focal position when in full bloom, and to change plants around as each reaches its peak.
  - Growing plants in containers allows us to vary the potting mix for each plant. This is particularly useful if our garden soil is not suited to certain plants we wish to grow.
  - We are able to also adjust watering, fertilising etc., to suit the needs of each individual plant when we are growing them in containers.
  - We can move containers from season to season to suit the needs of the plants being grown, ie. in a sunny position in winter, but with more shade in the hot summer, or in a protected position during winter in areas of severe frost.
- Perhaps you have additional reasons for growing *Epacris* in containers -

### CHOOSING THE RIGHT CONTAINER

*Epacris* can be grown successfully in containers made of terracotta, glazed or unglazed ceramics, plastic, timber or metal. If timber is used it should be of a durable material which will not rot down quickly, but materials such as treated pine should be avoided as the chemicals are likely to adversely affect the plants. Metal containers are occasionally seen, but these should not be used in hot sunny situations as heat is transferred through to the potting mix and the tender roots of plants such as *Epacris* can suffer burning. Metal containers should also be avoided in areas of heavy frosts.

Hanging baskets can be made of the above materials, or are also obtainable made from wire frames with linings of fibre, recycled wool, or recycled car tyres. All are suitable for use with *Epacris*.

Pots with a diameter and depth of 25-30 cm or more are usually very suitable for the cultivation of *Epacris* plants for several years.

All containers should have adequate holes to allow the potting mixture to drain freely.

### POTTING MIXES

A good quality standard potting mix is recommended for the cultivation of *Epacris* in containers. A potting mix without fertiliser etc. already added allows the user to select any appropriate additives for the specific plants being grown. It is better to avoid cheap potting mixes, without the Standards Association ticks of approval.

### FERTILISERS

The use of a low-phosphorus, slow-release fertiliser at the time of planting will assist the initial growth of *Epacris* plants as they become established in the container. Subsequently a light application of similar fertiliser each spring is usually sufficient to ensure ongoing health and vigour of container-grown plants. Liquid seaweed can also be used with success on *Epacris* plants in containers.

Further input from members on fertilisers they have found to be useful would be very welcome.

### WATERING

Containers need to be watered regularly to ensure that the mix is kept moist but not waterlogged. Good drainage holes in pots are important. Water-retaining granules or crystals can be added to the potting mix if desired and self-watering containers can also be used with good success.

## Growing Epacris in Containers - Study Group Members Contributions

JOHN EMMS of Loch in West Gippsland Vic has supplied information on his results with the growing of *Epacris* plants in containers.

John says he prunes all his pots after their spring flowering period and the pruned pots spend the summer in a semi-shaded position.

Firstly we will start with John's success stories.

*Epacris barbata* - Very attractive when in flower

*Epacris brevifolia* - A first class pot plant,  
with large clusters of pure white flowers in spring.

*Epacris impressa* - All of the colour range do well - particularly the  
white-flowered form and the red-flowered 'Bega' form.

*Epacris lanuginosa* - A showy plant which flowers for relatively long periods.

*Epacris pulchella* - Pink-flowered form - well worthwhile.

*Epacris reclinata* - Most attractive, with red/pink flowers

Those which have been less successful include the following.

*Epacris longiflora* - Good flowering but generally does better in the garden.

*E. gunnii* (double-flowered form) and *E. tasmanica*

Both died without flowering.

*E. obtusifolia* - Has been tried in full sun, part sun, shade and also  
self-watering pots - all to no avail.

John is still trying to find the right spot for *E. petrophila*. It is most attractive when in flower, with moderate flowering in semi-shade, but only one flower last year when the pot was placed in full shade.

John has *Epacris mucronulata* and *E. myrtifolia* growing together in a tub.

In full sun they grow abundant foliage and few flowers.

In shade they are reluctant to flower at all.

Other members may have comments on John's results, as compared to their own.

DICK BURNS former *Epacris* Study Group Secretary wrote in 1999 to say that on the Tasman Peninsula *Epacris myrtifolia* can get to 2 m tall and is spectacular with mass flowering. Dick's plant was at that stage close to 20 years old and straggles across the ground with dense growth.

PAT WEBB, Leader of the Australian Plants for Containers Study Group has written to say she has had *Epacris gunnii* in a container for two years and it is growing very well. She prunes it severely and it responds well.

Pat likes its structural growth with branches going all ways! It has a nice long flowering period. The pot is located on a patio where it gets early morning sun.

"A most successful container plant".

I have found *Epacris longiflora* to be an excellent container plant, provided it is pruned at least once each year. It will tolerate fairly hard pruning, but frequent tip pruning maintains a more attractive plant. It can be grown in a regular tub or a hanging basket using a standard good-quality potting mix. The container needs to be kept moist and a situation with filtered sun or sun for only part of the day (particularly in summer) seems to be best.

### CAN YOU HELP WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON GROWING Epacris IN CONTAINERS ?

It appears that several of our Study Group members are growing *Epacris* plants in containers. We have only touched on the topic here, and there is much more which could be added.

Do you have comments related to any of the species mentioned above, or in regard to other species you are growing, or have grown in the past.

We would like to continue the topic of potting mixes, watering and fertiliser use for *Epacris* grown in containers and invite you to send in details of what you have found to be most successful.

Have you found certain potting mixes and fertilisers to be better than others ? Have you tried fish emulsions or worm castings?

Have you used any soil-wetters or water-retaining crystals?

Please let us know, so that others can benefit from your experiences.

## Epacris Study Group Newsletter - March 2001

### ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS A.S.G.A.P. 2001 CONFERENCE & SEMINAR

Have you been to Canberra in the spring recently? If not, why not plan now to attend this Conference & Seminar, to be held from September 29th to October 5th this year.

The topic is AUSTRALIAN PLANTS IN A CHANGING WORLD, and the program is studded with interesting and informative sessions - not to mention the very enjoyable times to be shared with other native plant enthusiasts at coffee breaks, meal times and other social occasions.

The venue will be at Hawker College in the Belconnen area, with accommodation available nearby. A pre-conference tour is available from September 24th, and a post-conference tour goes from October 6th - 10th.

Study Group contributions and presentations will be made on Wednesday October 3rd.

If you do not have a conference brochure and registration form this can be obtained by contacting Hilary Merritt, at P.O. Box 217, Civic Square ACT 2608.

### A Crossword - with Epacris at its centre

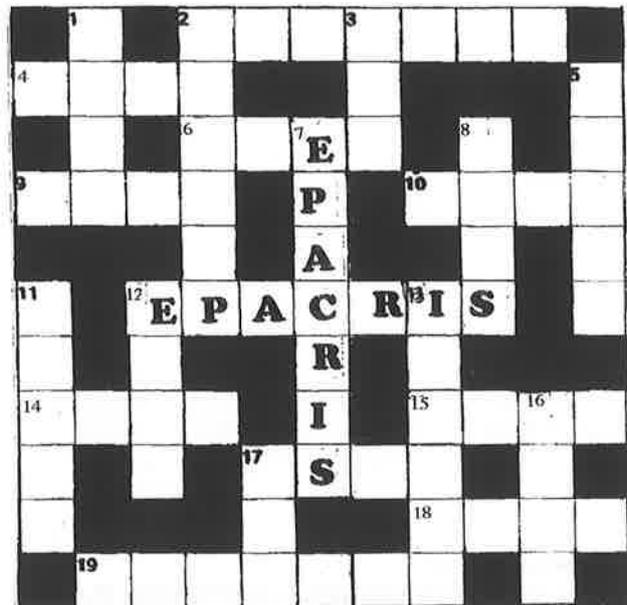
#### CLUES

##### Across

- 2 Imprint or stamp
- 4 A strand of liquid-conducting tissue within a leaf
- 6 A stalk of a plant
- 9 An accumulation of partly decomposed plant matter
- 10 A hollow cylinder or narrow pot commonly used for seedlings of Australian plants
- 12 The genus of our Study Group
- 14 The angle formed by a leaf and the stem which bears it.
- 15 Sodium chloride
- 17 A small island
- 18 To harvest
- 19 Insert or fix.

##### Down

- 1 A unit of heredity
- 2 The inner arch of a foot
- 3 A raised edge or border
- 5 A Latin prefix meaning short
- 7 See 12 across
- 8 Shoots from which stems, leaves or flowers develop
- 11 A common name for species of *Epacris*
- 12 To re-word or correct.
- 13 To place one item into another
- 16 An outgrowth from a plant stem, important for photosynthesis & transpiration
- 17 Unwell



Solution in the next  
Epacris Study Group  
Newsletter.

**Epacris Study Group - Membership information.**

Membership of The Epacris Study Group and other Study Groups of the Australian Plant Society / Society for Growing Australian Plants is available only to members of the A.P.S. / S.G.A.P.

Membership of any Australian state group, not necessarily that of the area in which you reside, entitles you to membership of one or more study groups.

You can join the EPACRIS STUDY GROUP for just \$5.00 per year (Overseas \$10 Aust.) renewable in June.

Memberships should be sent to P.O. Box 655, Heathmont 3135.

Please make your cheque payable to The Epacris Study Group.

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