

## **EPACRIS STUDY GROUP**

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### **NEWSLETTER**

**No. 7**

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**March 1999**

Greetings to all EPACRIS STUDY GROUP members.

Thank you for your many letters since our last Newsletter in September. Extracts from several of these appear in the following pages, and items specifically intended for inclusion in our Newsletters are always particularly welcome.

To avoid incurring additional expenses for the Study Group I have not posted out separate receipts for new and renewed memberships, however for those who have sent payments your receipt is attached at the base of Page 7. Alternatively a Membership Form is attached. We realise that many SGAP or APS groups renew their Study Group memberships at the beginning or end of each financial year.

Many members have expressed concerns and frustrations in regard to the propagation of *Epacris*. Therefore instead of a species profile in this Newsletter a page has been included on the PROPAGATION OF EPACRIS FROM SEED. Some growers undoubtedly have experiences which differ from, or are additional to, the information contained on this page, and it would be helpful if you are able to let us have a few lines, a paragraph or a whole article for our next Newsletter.

In a future Newsletter we will look in detail at Propagation from Cuttings and other vegetative methods, so would welcome news of your successes (or failures) with propagation by these means.

We have received several comments in regard to our last Newsletter's profile species of *Epacris impressa* and these have been included here, with thanks to all who have written.

In our September Newsletter we hope to profile one of the most popular species in cultivation, *Epacris longiflora*, the Fuchsia Heath, so would appreciate any information members are able to supply regarding this particular species. Several forms are being grown, so let us know which you have, and the conditions they like. We will also be including a full list of members and our annual financial statement in the next Newsletter.

Looking ahead to Newsletter No. 9 we will have a profile of *Epacris breviflora*, the Drumstick Heath from Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. This is species which is being grown by several members, but it has not been covered in earlier Newsletters, so please put pen to paper, and help us to share an informative profile.

In the meantime happy gardening, and in particular best wishes for success with your propagation and cultivation of *Epacris* plants.

*Gwen Elliot*

## **NEWS AND NOTES FROM MEMBERS**

RON CROWDEN, our former Study Group leader has sent us an interesting letter from Tasmania which includes the following excerpts.

*I was very pleased indeed to receive the recent copy of the newsletter of the Epacris Study Group.... I hope that I will be able to provide you with items of interest from time to time. Although I have formally retired from the University of Tasmania, I still have a considerable interest in the whole family Epacridaceae, and the genus Epacris in particular.*

*Prior to my retirement I was engaged, with my colleague, Yvonne Menadue, in a taxonomic revision of the genus. We have handed all of our collected information for this project over to Dr. Elizabeth Brown, at the National Herbarium in Sydney, and hopefully he will be able to complete the work in the not too distant future.*

*Yvonne and I currently are preparing an article on the Tasmanian Epacridaceae for "Australian Plants". Since Epacris has the most species, by far, of all Tasmanian epacrid genera, I guess it will be pertinent to the Study Group's interest.*

Ron also included a paragraph on seed germination, which can be found with other items on this topic later in this Newsletter. Many thanks Ron for your letter and encouragement.

MALCOLM REED of New South Wales has sent a note of appreciation for our last Newsletter and hopes that the Study Group will be able to expand to include *Woolfsia* and *Lysinema*, which are of course other members of the Epacridaceae family.

That would certainly be great Malcolm. Hopefully we can take a look at the whole family in the near future, to give us a good perspective as to where *Epacris* fits in, and the differences between the different genera.

If we reach the stage where we feel we have looked fairly thoroughly at *Epacris* species we should certainly expand to take in other Epacridaceae genera. Alternatively there may be another study group established, just as there are several study groups within the Proteaceae family, ie. *Banksia*, *Dryandra*, *Grevillea* and *Hakea*.

JENNIE LAWRENCE of Burnie, Tas. plans to have a go at propagating *Epacris* seed, although previously she has only grown plants from cuttings. She is currently growing the Tasmanian species *E. barbata*, *E. curtisiae*, *E. gunnii*, *E. impressa*, *E. lanuginosa*, *E. marginata*, *E. mucronulata*, *E. myrtifolia* and *E. petrophila*. From the mainland, Jennie has *E. brevifolia*, *E. longiflora*, *E. reclinata* and *E. microphylla*.

Thanks for your note Jennie, and do let us know how you go with the seed.

ELS HAYWARD of Taroona Tas. has renewed her membership and mentioned that she is also Vice President of the Steering Committee of the Understorey Network. This network 'promotes the protection of existing native vegetation and the use of local native understorey in revegetation'. They propagate plants for revegetation projects, have field days and workshops and have created a database at the Botanical Gardens, Hobart. Membership is \$15 per year, payable to the Understorey Network, (Alison Moore, Co-ordinator), 298 Patersonia Road, Nunamara Tas. 7259.

## **NOTES FROM MEMBERS regarding *Epacris impressa***

CHERREE DENSELY of Killarney near Warrnambool Vic has sent the following observations about epacris in her particular area.

*Epacris impressa* in general has a long flowering season - one of the earliest flowers after the autumn rains and some flowers can still be found even in very late spring.

On Mt. Clay I have noticed over the years that different colour forms of *Epacris impressa* flower in different situations and wonder if anyone has done some proper research into the reason for colour variation. (My observations are very casual.) For instance, the very dark red form is the EARLIEST flowering and it is found in conjunction with *Gahnia radula* (the one that forms a small clump with spreading underground rhizomes and has a dark very graceful head of flowers/seeds). The areas in which the two grow - with other small plants too of course - are low and wet (but not swamps) and nearly always damp throughout the year. The colour is more intense too, in clay and clay gravels. However the white form - which flowers LATER too, is found in better drained areas and on both clay and sandy soils. The pinks are more often found in the sandy areas too.

JILL ROBERTS from Leith in Tasmania has found that in her area *Epacris impressa* likes acid soils.

In regard to our request for comments on the currently available nursery label Jill adds that in Tasmania *Epacris impressa* occurs from the coast to sub-alpine areas. She also feels that plants would be too tall for positioning at the front of a rockery - as recommended on the label. I think that many of us would agree here Jill. Thanks for your letter.

MARION SIMMONS of Legana, Tas has contributed some comments on *Epacris impressa* for which we are very grateful.

Although the local species is easy enough to strike, for some reason it does not seem to last long in our garden, one or two years at best. However there is one exception which has survived for 3 or so years at least. It is a totally white flowered form which is in full flower now - in November. It is about 75 cm tall and around 40 cm wide with many erect stems. It is growing in what seems to be a dry spot but I think it must be getting some moisture from underground.

Looking at the local forms growing by the roadside and which are mown off regularly, it seems they survive in spite of the rough treatment they receive. It looks as though they too grow where there is moisture.

It is interesting to note that the word MOISTURE seems to keep coming up in regard to the successful cultivation of *Epacris impressa*. One long-term grower in Victoria feels that built-up sandy beds which are well-drained but still moisture-retaining are proving the secret of success for him now, combined with planting mainly young rooted cuttings rather than well-established plants in larger pots.

### *Epacris impressa* - IN FLOWER IN SUMMER

As I prepare this Newsletter during February I am looking at a vase with flower colours of white, pale pink and deep pink, from the garden of BOB ANDERSON, at Healesville, about 50 km east of Melbourne, and certainly not in an alpine area. Other growers have also told of plants being in bloom this year, right from New Year onwards. Has this happened in your garden or nearby bushland? Do plants regularly bloom at this time of year? Please let us know.

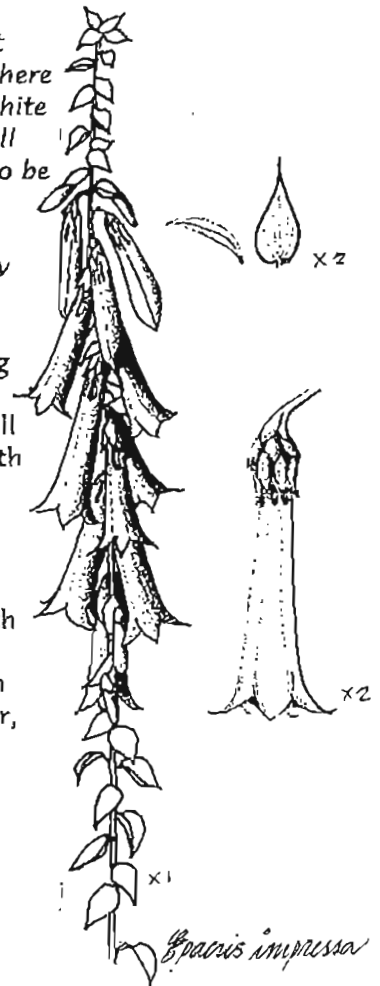


Illustration by John Armstrong

## **NEWS AND NOTES - Continued**

BOB O'NEILL of Wandin North, Vic, says he finds the *Epacris* genus challenging in cultivation, where he meets pearls of success interspersed with puzzling failures.

Bob is Study Group Liaison Officer for APS Victoria, and his garden was open in conjunction with the Australian Open Garden Scheme last spring. He writes - *At one stage I had the understanding that many parts of our garden would suit the Epacris, but that in the course of time has proven to be not the case. Instead I can now see that the different species or forms are perhaps more specific than I originally believed. Too wet, too dry - failure. I am curious whether perhaps too much mulch could be a problem, or whether I do not prune enough. I am not out of ideas to investigate yet.*

Bob plans to do an article for a future Newsletter, and this will be most welcome. Thanks Bob.

BILL GUNN was heading off to the Snowy Mountains to 'amuse the trout' and look for *Epacris* 'Cabramurra', when he wrote at the end of October.

As a keen *Epacris* enthusiast Bill we'll have to enlist your assistance when we do our species profile on *Epacris gunnii*.

Incidentally *Epacris breviflora* is the species which was grown for many years as *E. 'Cabramurra'*. This species will be the topic of our Profile in Newsletter 9, next year, so maybe Bill will let us know if he found plants in the Snowy Mountains.

PROF. GEORGE WADE writes of his admiration for *Epacris myrtifolia*

*I have found Epacris myrtifolia Labill a very satisfactory garden plant. I first saw it on the Cape Raoul track a number of years ago. Cuttings strike very well and my garden has never been without it. It thrives in my sandy loam at Kingston garden but also did well in a black clay loam when I lived at Tarooma. It survives for many years, in fact none of my plants have died! The flowers are well displayed over many weeks and it is easy to keep the plants shapely.*

Perhaps other members have experience of growing *Epacris myrtifolia* and we should place it high on our list for a future Species Profile.

PAT MacDONALD of Langwarrin Vic, has told of her efforts to collect *Epacris* seed, which have usually ended up with a bag of bits of flowers (none of which grow) and lots of tiny spiders, ants and various insects rushing all around the table and environs for days afterwards.

Many of us can probably relate to this scene Pat, with *Epacris* and other plants. Hopefully our Profile page on Propagation may give some ideas which could help a bit.

The WILSON PARK group of the Australian Plants Society is involved in planting the native plant garden beds at the Wilson Botanic Park, at Princes Highway, Berwick Vic. They will be planting a new site in May and June, with working bees on the 3rd Saturday of each month, and hope to include *Epacris* plants in this area.

If you have surplus plants which you would like to donate to the garden, or if you would like to help in the working bees, please contact the secretary, Mrs. Janet Watson, at 6 Kinta Close, Berwick.

### **AVAILABILITY OF *Epacris* PLANTS**

We have numerous queries regarding the availability of *Epacris* from nurseries throughout Australia and would welcome information from members in this regard.

## Special PROFILE TOPIC

# PROPAGATION OF *Epacris* FROM SEED



*Epacris* seedlings often appear in gardens, particularly in areas where soil has been disturbed, but difficulties are often experienced in controlled propagation from seed. The aspects involved in the successful propagation of *Epacris* from seed appear to fall into four separate categories -

- a) Collection of the Seed .
- b) Storage of the Seed and Viability Period
- c) Germination of the Seed
- d) Successful development of young Seedlings.

### a) Collection of *Epacris* Seed.

*Epacris* seed is produced in 5-valved capsules, usually about 3.5 mm long, with numerous very small brown to blackish seeds in each cell.

Seed collection time in south-eastern Australia is often between December and February but this will vary considerably in accordance with flowering period.

A major difficulty appears to be that the total seed on a plant can sometimes ripen and be dispersed on the one day. Unless plants are observed regularly the seed can be lost.

As the capsules begin to dry the small brown to blackish seeds can be revealed when a capsule is picked and opened, or are shed when the branch is shaken.

Use a clean dry plastic metal or glass container, without seams where the seed can be caught, and hold it under the fruiting stem. Run one hand along the stem so that the small capsules fall into the container or pick the capsules individually and place them in the container.

Take the container inside or away from an breeze and place the contents in a tea or rice strainer or a similar object with a fine plastic or wire mesh. Stir the contents vigorously so that the seeds fall through into a container below. The husks of the capsules plus odd leaves etc which have been gathered will be retained in the strainer and can be thrown out. You should now have a container of *Epacris* seed, with perhaps the odd small leaf or fragment of the seed capsule. If there are any tiny insects in the container these should be removed so that the seed is not eaten before you are ready to plant it.

If you are unable to observe a plant carefully until the seed ripens the fruiting stem can be placed in a calico bag which is then tied firmly. It may be necessary to cut the stem at the time of collection. A paper bag can be used but it can disintegrate if it becomes wet during the ripening period. Nylon stockings provide an alternative, but the small seeds and plant fragments can become lodged in the fabric and difficult to remove.

A sheet of fine weed-mat or a plastic sheet can also be placed around the base of a plant to catch the seed as it falls to the ground.

This space is for your own observations & other information on the collection of *Epacris* seed.

## b) Storage of *Epacris* Seed.

*Epacris* seed can have a dormancy period, with better germination sometimes achieved if the seed is stored for 12 - 14 weeks prior to sowing.

Seed should be stored in a cool, dry, dark location.

## c) Germination of *Epacris* Seed.

Several growers and researchers recommend that *Epacris impressa* seed be stratified prior to sowing, or immediately after sowing.

Stratification is used particularly for plants which experience low temperatures combined with moisture in their natural habitat. In cool climates seed can be sown in autumn then left outdoors for the chill factor to be effective during the winter.

Alternatively seed can be sown in a moist mix and the seedling tray placed in a refrigerator for a period of between one and eight weeks. The temperature commonly used for stratification is between 1 and 5 degrees Centigrade. Seeds should not be placed in a freezer, as tissue damage will occur. Another method can be to place the seed with premoistened peat moss in a sealed plastic bag near the bottom of the refrigerator for about a month prior to planting.

Seed should be sown in a well-drained medium with the ability to retain sufficient moisture to promote germination. Propagation mixtures of around 3 parts sand plus one part peat moss have been used with success or commercially packaged seed-raising mixes are also readily available.

In addition to conventional seed-raising, where the container is simply placed in a sheltered situation until germination occurs, success has been achieved by using the 'bog method' (where the seedling tray is placed in a container of shallow water) and also by leaving the seed uncovered in the tray and placing it under a misting system until germination occurs.

Germination can take from a few weeks to several months, so don't be too anxious to throw out trays of seed which appear to show no results.

Considerable success has been achieved by using smoke-treatment of seed and propagation medium and this aspect is included elsewhere in this and other Newsletters of the *Epacris* Study Group.

## d) Successful development of *Epacris* Seedlings

Difficulty has been experienced by growers in achieving successful development of young *Epacris* seedlings, from the transplanting stage.

The seedlings have very fine roots which must be handled with care when transplanting, to avoid damage. Plants must also be placed in a sheltered situation during this initial development stage.

It is also thought that at this stage the micorrhizal associations involved in good root development may hold an important key to success here, and research is being undertaken on this aspect. We hope to be able to report further in future Newsletters.

*This space is for your own notes on the Storage and Germination of *Epacris* seed, and the Development of Young Seedlings.*

## **SMOKE ASSISTED SEED GERMINATION**

The item on seed smoking in our last Newsletter prompted considerable interest among members, many of whom wrote and received some of the Smoke Primers.

We understand from JO WALKER OF NEW SOUTH WALES that these Smoke Primers, produced at Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens in South Africa are now obtainable through the Nindethana Seed Service, PO Box 2121, Albany WA, for \$3 each or \$13.75 for five. Thank you Jo, for this information.

Thanks to RON CROWDEN, former Epacris Study Group leader, who has provided us with the following report of his experiences.

*Your item on smoke assisted germination of Epacris seed was timely. I have successfully germinated seed of many of the species with smoke treatment. I simply place the seed, already sown (thinly, with minimal fine sand covering and lightly watered) in seed punnets, in a plastic bag, and blow smoke in using a bee smoker, seal the bag and leave for half an hour or so, remove and give another light watering, then place the punnet(s) in a shade house and wait for germination to occur. This is usually no more than 3 or 4 weeks, provided the punnets are kept moist (not wet).*

CHERREE DENSLEY, Editor of the Victorian APS Newsletter writes that

Seawinds Nursery, Portland Vic. have offered to smoke seed of any native plants for members of SGAP Study Groups. The Manager of Seawinds Nursery, Tilly Govenstone says they frequently have their 'smoker' going and will do any other seed when they are doing some of their own. Tilly and her husband Andrew are both long-standing members of SGAP. You just need to post your seed to Seawinds Nursery, Portland Vic. 3305, enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return. Many thanks to Seawinds Nursery.

### THE SMOKED KIPPER METHOD

There are obviously numerous methods of achieving the 'smoking' process in seed germination. One of the more unusual ones passed on to us by an English friend was to obtain a smoked kipper, soak it in water, then use that water to soak the seed in, or for watering in the seed after planting. Those who enjoy a smoked kipper for breakfast will undoubtedly gain a double bonus in using this method!

### REGEN 2000

is another smoke product which has come to our attention. This smoke water concentrate is diluted before use. The distributor is Treemax, phone 03) 9429 6000.

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Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants Inc.  
EPACRIS STUDY GROUP.

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*C. Wren-Elliott*