

Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants
EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER No. 53

August 1994

In the last Newsletter I suggested that we could look at the use of eremophilas in urban plantings, e.g. roadsides, wall, public parks etc. Unfortunately I only received two responses to this, so the item will have to lapse until a future date.

As a STUDY GROUP we are attempting to do just that. In addition we are obliged to make the results of our STUDY available through this newsletter to the other members as well as to the ASGAP in general through our wider distribution to the numerous association members who contribute in a very generous way to our financial status. In addition, our newsletter has been referred to on many occasions in scientific works. Much of the work of 'amateurs' is of great value to the professional botanists, however, it will never be of value if you keep it all to yourselves. PLEASE: put pen to paper and send in your contribution for the next newsletter.

I was very pleased to receive from Jim and Wilma Thomson, who live at Dooralong in NSW, an offer to put on a display of eremophilas at the Rouse Hill Wildflower Show which was held at the end of July. We extend our great appreciation to them for their contribution. A more detailed account is given in a separate article.

Subscriptions have been coming in on a regular basis, however, there are still many not yet received. To those of you who have received this newsletter, you are financial. I have ceased sending the newsletter to the unfinancial ones — this will cut our outlay a little, although we are not in financial difficulties.

Colin Jennings

WILDFLOWER SHOW – ROUSE HILL

Thanks to the initiative of Jim and Wilma Thomson, the Eremophila Study Group was able to mount a display at the ASGAP Wildflower Show at Rouse Hill.

The Study Group received an invitation to display eremophilas at this show, however, we were initially not able to respond to the invitation.

Early in June I received a phone call from Wilma. She asked if it would be possible for her and Jim to mount a display for the Study Group. I was very pleased to be able to send to her a number of photographs, together with a set of posters which we have used in other displays. Jim and Wilma did the rest, with the help of Noel Gane and Ross Doig.

Jim sent a letter to me just a few days ago. In that he enclosed a number of colour photographs showing the display. It is a credit to them both for the manner in which they have put the display together.

So much was their presentation appreciated that they have been asked to put on the same display at the Central Coast (NSW) Show from 8th to 11th September.

From Jim's account of the show he refers to the interest in the genus shown by the visitors; many of whom had not seen the eremophilas before. This kind of display helps widen the interest in eremophilas generally.

Our sincere thanks to Jim and Wilma for their forethought and time very well spent on our behalf.

Colin Jennings

USERS OF EREMOPHILAS, PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

I have received from Guy Richmond a copy of a paper which he has recently had published in *Economic Botany*, a publication of the New York Botanic Garden.

Guy was doing his Ph.D. thesis at the time he presented the paper for publication. He is now working in the Department of Horticultural Science in the Faculty of Agriculture in Perth, after working with Western Mining in Kambalda.

Guy is co-author of the paper with Emilio Ghisalberti, also from Curtin University.

The paper, titled "The Australian Desert Shrub *Eremophila* (Myoporaceae): Medicinal, Cultural, Horticultural & Phytochemical Uses." was published in *Economic Botany* 48(1): 35–59, 1994.

Members of the study group may get access to this paper through their local library service.

The introduction to the paper reads:

“Traditional, current and potential uses of 83 *Eremophila* species are documented. In Australia, some *Eremophila* species are regarded as invasive woody weeds. There are documented cases in which *Eremophila* species have been reported as poisonous to travelling and drought – driven stock, but certain species are valued as fodder. Traditionally, this genus has been valued for medicinal and cultural purposes by Aboriginal people. The reported uses as a cure of medical disorders are documented for 18 species. Many of the 210 *Eremophila* species are recognised for their horticultural potential. They are also useful in revegetation programmes because of their drought, fire, frost and grazing tolerances. *Eremophila* species produce resin, composed of terpenes and flavones, which may be useful in the naval stores industry or as sources for specialty chemicals.”

I have read the paper and have found it to be a very comprehensive and well documented presentation.

Colin Jennings

ASGAP 1995 CONFERENCE

The organising Committee for the Conference have invited the leader and deputy of the Study Group to attend the Conference.

A full day “Study Group Leaders’ Conference/Workshop” represents part of the conference with a “Display/Trading Night” on the following Tuesday.

Although a little way down the track, I hope to be able to attend and represent the Eremophila Study Group.

The venue is the Ballarat University and the date is September 1995. I will give further details in the Newsletter when I have more information.

Colin Jennings

FROM YOUR LETTERS

Peter Lang (Mildura, Victoria)

... life here at the nursery has been very busy and hectic. Demand for eremophilas continues to grow from the general public and especially government bodies such as councils etc. The planting of *Eremophila* species by both Mildura City Council and Mildura Shire Councils has increased considerably in the past three to four years. Recreation parks, municipal gardens, median strips along highways are sites often used for plantings. Lately Mildura City Council has used *Eremophila youngii* as a street shrub on nature strips.

Demand is strong for *E. maculata* forms, especially variation in flower colour, (most popular would be *E. maculata* var. *brevifolia*), *E. glabra* (Murchison River form), *E. nivea*, *E. youngii*, *E. oppositifolia*, (especially pink and purple forms). Overall there is growing interest from the public in growing eremophilas and a willingness to try new species.

(When last in Mildura I was very impressed with the large range of excellently grown stock which Peter had at the nursery. He had a very good variety of colour forms of *E. oppositifolia*, which I understand came from the Millewa area to the south west of Mildura.)

Joyce Strong (Caves Beach, New South Wales)

Joyce followed up on the letter from her son in Newsletter No. 52.

“In Newsletter #52 Philip Strong refers to growing eremophilas in pots on the east coast. This is the only way to have any success with these plants, although I have one which came from a cutting, a yellowish/orange *E. maculata* and it has been in the ground, well drained and dry, watered only by a drip system and it is a survivor, having lasted about eight years.

With those in pots the roots venture into the ground and the plant lasts for quite a few years.”

Meg Officer (via Mullewa, Western Australia)

Meg was co-opted as a member by Bob Chinnock two years ago during his WA trip.

"It was very kind of Bob to sign me up. I had heard of you, but had decided it was only for those who grow eremophilas, so had not joined. However, I've gathered all sorts of interesting bits and pieces from the newsletters, and I feel a stir of interest in growing them coming on. Someone gave me your booklet of newsletters ..."

We live on a sheep station in the Murchison – the Murchison River runs through the top end of our country. I've always loved the eremophilas that grow here and had terrible difficulty finding out their names (or trying to key them out from books they weren't in) till I discovered Bob! Now I've got most of the ones here sorted out – there are about thirty species.

The last couple of years have been good seasons, but we badly need some rain at the moment. The eremophilas aren't looking very pretty at the moment – hardly any leaves, let alone flowers.

The only one I have growing in the garden is a South Australian one – the yellow *E. maculata*! I've never felt the need before with such a large garden of them out in the bush. I do silly things like try to grow roses in pots instead!

(Meg has offered to provide seed of the local species if anyone is interested. Please let Colin know if you are genuinely interested. I do not have any at present, but will contact Meg as the need exists.)

Neil Marriott (ex White Gums Nursery, Stawell, Victoria)

As you may be aware Neil and Jane sold their property and moved to a new property in the Grampians, where they have to start a new garden.

"... Since closing down 'White Gums' we have been flat out building on our new property and establishing new gardens. Our soil here is highly acidic granite sand, so I'm not sure how eremophilas will grow. However, I've been grafting a few and they are growing strongly on the hot, north-facing slopes."

Robin Hartley (Dalby, Queensland)

Unfortunately, Robin, like so many others, has been experiencing the drought. It has obviously been having its effect both on the crops etc, and also on the home garden.

Robin is also asking if there is any publication which gives suitable information about eremophilas, e.g. their size, frost hardiness, flower colour, soil preference etc.

Unfortunately there is no one such publication. It is still a matter of sifting and sorting from different sources.

"... I was also wondering if anyone in the Study Group has tried the 'smoke process' in stimulating eremophilas for propagation. I haven't, but would be interested."

P.S. Dalby has no eremophilas used for street planting. They are quite a boring Council – apart from *Grevillea robusta* and *Eucalyptus torquata*, not much to see in our streetsides."

Brother Howard (Tabulam, New South Wales)

I received a very interesting letter from Brother Howard, outlining his background and his request to join the Study Group.

"I have just this week sent off my sub. to join SGAP. I have two special interests in Australian plants – eremophilas and grevilleas – hence my letter to you with \$2 to join the Eremophila Study Group."

I first became interested in eremophilas when living and working in Broken Hill. Much time was spent exploring the arid parts of New South Wales, South Australia and western Victoria. I was captivated by the "emu bush" when it was a mass of flowers in the spring.

In the intervening years I became a Franciscan brother in the Anglican church, and seven years ago, with two other brothers founded the order the "Little Brothers of Francis". Our

community is especially interested in the Franciscan hermit tradition, in which brothers live in small groups in fairly remote places. The prayer life of the brothers is a central concern. We try to be self-supporting and grow as much of our own food as we can.

This hermit tradition has its origins in third-century Egypt, where monks lived a similar life in remote desert places. Hence our use of "*Eremophila*" as the name for our property. In Greek ερημος (eremos) means desert, or lonely place, or desolate and φιλεω, (phileo) meaning to love. *Eremophila* or desert-lover is an especially apt name for a place for hermits to live! The word hermit is also derived from eremos.

The word monk has a similar derivation, coming from the Greek word μοναχος, meaning solitary.

We spent several years trying to come up with a suitable name for our place. We came up with everything from Aboriginal words to saints' names, and from descriptive names like rocky gully to "Footrot Flats"! It wasn't till two of the brothers went west to fish the Darling that we got our inspiration. "Emu bush" was in flower all along the road near Eugonia. And so "*Eremophila*" seemed the perfect name!

We are not ideally located to grow *eremophilas*, being on the eastern side of the Great Dividing Range. We have four *eremophilas* thriving in pots. We are going to take a chance and plant them out. We are fortunate to be in steep country with granite soil. We hope it will be sufficiently well-drained for our plants to grow. The species we have are *E. decipiens* and *E. maculata* (red and mauve forms). We'll keep you posted!

Colin Jennings

SMOKE TREATMENT OF SEEDS

Many anecdotal accounts have been made of the influence of fire on the germination of seeds of our Australian native plants. Many of our "natives" release their seed only after a fire and in order to release seed from pods, one is recommended to place the pod in an oven or to put the seed capsule in a fire to help the seeds' release.

I was prompted to write this article by the letter from Robin Hartley.

In addition to the interest I have in Australian native plants I have also developed a great interest in the plants of the Cape, (South Africa); particularly the bulbous and cormous plants.

It appears that there is some current research being done in South Africa relating to the influence, not only of fire, but of the smoke that is produced. It would appear that there is some significant contribution to germination of seed and to the 'awakening' of underground storage structures, by the smoke that is produced by the 'cold burn' of the grasses and perennial plants of the location.

In Western Australia there is also some current research being conducted. No doubt we will hear of the results in due course.

Given a little more time I will try to document the information and present it at a later date.

If any members of the Study Group have any factual information I would appreciate hearing from you. Anecdotal information would also be welcomed, but please do not mix fact with fiction!

Colin Jennings

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