

Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants
EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER No. 60

December 1996

In the last Newsletter I made a request for information about growing eremophilas as potted plants—alas I received but three replies. I would have thought that there were more members of the Study Group who were growing their eremophilas in pots and who could have passed on a few details about their experiences. I had intended to devote most of this issue to that topic, and to be able to forward a resume to the Australian Plants for Containers Study Group. Perhaps I can expect a flood of replies over the next month or so and make it a feature of the **NEXT** Newsletter. I will, however, report on the information I have received to date, in fairness to those who did respond.

It is pleasing to note that there have been some positive responses to the article written by Paul Rezl in the last Newsletter. It is great to see such enthusiasm from a member so far away, and who has such limited access to material to work with.

If you have paid your subscription since the last Newsletter was posted, you will find your receipt enclosed with this one. I am now writing on the receipt the years which your payment covers. I hope that this will enable you to keep up-to-date. It is costly to send out reminder notices for each member, and with our subscriptions being just \$2, I am sure that this is the most effective way. I will continue to use the red dot sticker on the April/May issue each year to remind you if you are due for renewal.

STUDY GROUP SEMINAR

At this stage I am not able to give a set date for this event. I have had a number of positive responses from members interested in such a function, but have not been able to work out a date which fits conveniently with the ASGAP Conference programme and with your requests. I will continue to work on this with the Organising Committee and await further indication from you the members of the Study Group. To date the indications are that about ten to fifteen would be interested in attending a day long seminar at the time of the Conference. If anyone else is at all interested, would you please let me know and also the day on which it would be most convenient to you. I have had a range of days requested and will need to look at the overall pattern.

ASGAP CONFERENCE

I have now arranged with the Show Committee of SGAP, SA Region to have a floor display of approximately 4 m × 4 m at their Spring Show, to be held on the weekend immediately preceding the Conference here in Adelaide. Several years ago, with the help of some local members we arranged a very worthwhile display of eremophilas, both potted and as cuts.

This time I hope to be able to make use of a greater range of material, both from local and if possible interstate members. I hope that those who can assist, particularly with potted plants will have started their organisation already. Please let me know if you will be able to assist in any way, particularly with potted plants in flower. Closer to the time I will need to know if you can assist with cut flowers for arrangement within the display.

We will also be arranging an educational display at the Conference location; this will, we hope, be available for the registrants to view at their leisure throughout the duration of the Conference.

ARID LANDS BOTANIC GARDEN – PORT AUGUSTA (SA)

Although I have not had the opportunity to visit this garden yet, I have heard from several members that the eremophilas planted several months ago, and reported on by Ken Warnes in the last Newsletter, are growing very well and appear to be establishing in this rather harsh environment.

Anyone travelling through Port Augusta on their way north to Alice Springs, or to WA, or to the Flinders Ranges is encouraged to stop off at the site and see what has been achieved; and not only with eremophilas.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

I have included the statement as supplied to the Coordinator of Study Groups in this issue. I have not done so in the past, having only recorded the actual balance at the bank without the supporting figures.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT ASGAP EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP 1995-96

	Debit	Credit	Balance
Books & Newsletters		133.50	
Subscriptions		289.00	
Donations		70.25	
Postage		80.50	
Interest (BankSA Account)		22.70	
Total			604.95
Postage	290.85		
Stationery	27.72		
Photocopying	5.00		
Thesis (ex Guy Richmond)	115.00		
Reimbursement (display J. Thomson)	15.00		
Telephone	11.22		
Bank Charges (FID & Stamp Duty)	9.72		
Total			474.51
Balance at 01.07.1995		1,940.44	
Receipts		604.95	
Total			2,545.39
Balance at 30.06.1996		1,928.58	
Petty Cash		142.30	
Expenditure		474.51	
Total			2,545.39

Colin Jennings,
Leader ASGAP Eremophila Study Group

SUNRAYSIA OASIS BOTANICAL GARDENS

In early October I received a letter from the President of this organisation, asking our Study Group to participate in this project.

The site is, I believe, near Gol Gol and offers opportunities to establish a comprehensive collection of eremophilas in one location, which also happens to be in a convenient location for tourism.

I have indicated an initial interest in the project, but have expressed a few concerns regarding costs, maintenance, provision of plants etc. To date I have had no further information from the organisation, but will keep you informed as I do.

An invitation to visit at some time in the future was also mentioned, and I indicated that I would be interested in such a visit, provided that it was at a convenient time.

EREMOPHILAS IN TUBS/POTS

Thank you to both Lyndal Thorburn (Queanbeyan, N.S.W.) and David Widdop (Corowa, N.S.W.) for information they have supplied in response to my request in the last Newsletter.

Lyndal states:

“We grow a lot of our stock plants in tubs 40 cm in diameter, in case we find they are not hardy and have to move them for winter protection. Many of them – those which grow over a metre in the wild – get quite ‘leggy’, but they seem to respond well to pruning.

Our best ones are:

Eremophila glabra [subsp. *albicans*] var. *viridiflora* – now six years old. This plant remains dense, with upright growth and lime green flowers well displayed for much of the year. It is currently 40 cm high and 50 cm across.

Eremophila weldii was purchased in 1994. This plant is now 50–60 cm high and flowered last year for the first time. It is upright in habit, but does seem to suffer the dieback of lower leaves that some of our other plants have.

Eremophila biserrata, a prostrate plant is also two years old and flowers well. It would be great in a hanging basket. Its flowers are small, but are an interesting two-tone, maroon and green. It strikes readily – we just keep tip pruning our plant for more cutting material.”

David has provided the following list:

“The wet winters and springs in three of the past four years have been disastrous for the eremophilas in the garden. I have lost over 90% of those that I had growing. Nevertheless, I haven’t given up hope and have a number of plants to put in this spring.

I have found, to some extent, that while eremophilas in the garden succumbed, many in pots continued to grow and flower. The following species are growing successfully in pots here.

E. calorhabdos, *E. maculata*, *E. youngii*, *E. oppositifolia*, "*E. complanata*", *E. purpurascens*, *E. weldii*, *E. santalina* (grafted) and *E. racemosa*.

In all cases I have used Debco 'Green Wizard' potting mix and have applied slow release fertiliser once or in some cases twice a year, (light application).

I have experienced difficulty in establishing *E. maculata* subsp. *brevifolia* in containers. I have even tried grafted plants, but they haven't developed into strong plants. I have noticed this year that in the wet weather this is the first plant to succumb.

CULTIVAR NAMES

I have received several letters from members in which they have asked about the cultivar names currently in use on potted plants obtained from nurseries.

It seems that many of these names have been applied to plants, many wild collected, simply to attract attention and to give a 'catchy' name to a coloured label. Very few of these names are registered and have no status either botanically or with the registering authority. As far as I am aware there is only ONE registered cultivar.

NURSERIES

David Widdop mentions a nursery at Goolwa, SA (Ibis Siding) which sells a good range of tubes and pots of eremophilas as well as many interesting natives. This nursery also has quite extensive garden planted out with natives, together with some exotics.

Philip Docherty (Karratha, WA) mentions in his letter that there is a very good nursery at Mukinbudin, WA – in the central/eastern wheatbelt. He also mentions that he was able to obtain several eremophilas from the Wooree Wildflower Nursery in Geraldton.

(The nursery at Mukinbudin would be that owned by one of our members, Mary Squire, I think.—Colin.)

I have had several requests for details of nurseries stocking a good range of eremophilas. I will try to get this published in the next issue of the Newsletter. Please let me know of any that I can list for the benefit of all members.

CANBERRA FLORIADE

Lyndal Thorburn in addition to the other information wrote:-

"I hope you will be pleased to know that Canberra's Annual flower festival, Floriade (tulips, daffodils, pansies etc.) now has a native plant display. This year the information tent also featured locally grown flowers (as opposed to those which have been 'forced on' for Floriade) and we were happy to be able to contribute several eremophilas in flower. These included *E. decipiens*, *E. phillipsii*, *E. pterocarpa*, *E.*

nivea, *E. maculata* (yellow flowered form), *E. drummondii* and *E. glabra* (Mingenew form).”

At the time of writing, Lyndal was also hopeful that *E. eriocalyx* (white flowered form) would also be out to show before the Floriade finished in mid-October.

FROM YOUR LETTERS

Barbara Daly – Cook, ACT

“I continue to grow a few eremophilas. *Eremophila maculata* likes my overcrowded garden. The red and the orange forms flower prolifically; they are all about three years old.

The soil here is clay, but well turned with compost.

The yellow form is apprehensive of our frosts and cold ground temperatures, but survives and flowers.

The *E. gibbifolia* (four of them) struggle on, but always seem to have a few welcome flowers. The Murchison River form of *E. glabra* is small and healthy, but does not seem to match the description. *Eremophila microtheca* is about 40 cm tall, healthy and dotted with flowers. This is a nursery specimen from Sydney. All are growing in the one bed, the sunniest in the garden.

I do have a few others, but the blackbirds remove the tags.”

Alice Aisthorpe – Roma, Queensland

“I have just finished planting 35 new varieties of eremophilas in one of my new beds. This is the third new bed planted up since November last year. I have a further three new beds under construction and I’ll then put new areas around the back edges of the garden as I am planning to have at least five of all of the varieties I am able to get my hands on.

The last plants came from a nursery in South Australia, the name and address was given to me when we were down in Toowoomba. I have passed the name and address on to my ‘tame’ local nurseryman and he is now keeping a nice range of plants.

We had a successful Dry Climate Seminar and after lunch the people visited our garden to see how to make the most of least water – GROW EREMOPHILAS!!

With the help of my seven year old daughter I won the Country Garden Competition. This is quite an accomplishment for the garden, since we can’t water lawns and I have never planted annuals. The seven year old daughter planted many annuals this winter everywhere she could see—it looked lovely.

Eremophila laanii was spectacular and fitted in with Rosamund’s colour theme of pink. With the visitors to the garden we hope we were able to promote eremophilas, as they certainly put on their best gowns.

There are now moves to put the garden in the Open Garden Scheme next year, so hopefully the rains will come in adequate amounts to peak the garden for spring.

Eremophila divaricata is doing its best now, the 'maculatas' are still flowering, *E. calorhabdos* is doing the birds a grand service and the lovely *E. macdonnellii* is glowing with colour.

All of the new varieties I've planted have burst into flower; must have been holding back in SA, but couldn't help themselves when they got into our 35°C heat, and possibly hotter at ground level."

Philip Docherty – Karratha, Western Australia

"Over the last set of school holidays I travelled from Karratha to Mullewa via Gascoyne Junction and Murchison. The trip was taken over a fairly leisurely two days and after the good recent rains, spanning from February through to an unusually wet June, it was great to see a huge number of eremophilas flowering even so early in the season. As a real novice to eremophilas it was exciting to see so many varieties I hadn't seen in flower before.

Among those seen were *E. fraseri*, *E. cuneifolia*, *E. maitlandii*, *E. margarethae*, *E. scoparia*, *E. foliosissima*, *E. forrestii*, *E. subfloccosa* and *E. pterocarpa*. It was also interesting to stop at Murchison, as they have a botanical walk outlining some of the local plant species. Included amongst these are *E. compacta*, *E. forrestii*, *E. serrulata*, *E. gilesii*, *E. longifolia* and *E. fraseri*. If people have the time and inclination it is a worthwhile trip and the wildflowers will not disappoint.

While in Mullewa I visited some of the local nurseries in Geraldton and was able to purchase some eremophilas. Most of these came from Wooree Wildflower Nursery. If anyone happens to visit Mullewa, my mother, Josephine Docherty, would be more than happy to be contacted; not only about eremophilas, but any other plants of the shire. She can be contacted at the doctor's surgery and she has a collection of pressed plants.

I now have about 15 species of eremophilas planted in the garden, most are looking very healthy (although the majority are less than one year old), however, I have lost several to what I put down to a combination of cockchafer group and/or overwatering. I have recently been able to plant out cuttings of *E. weldii* and *E. biserrata*. They seem to have adapted to the climate very well and growth is steady, however, the summer humidity may tell a different story. The cuttings were struck using a hormone powder and placed in a mix of perlite, sandy loam and composted soil. Both struck within a month and the success rate was high, especially *E. weldii*.

I have also placed seeds of *E. latrobei*, *E. cuneifolia* and *E. fraseri* in a mix. I first soaked the seeds in rainwater for a month before placing them in the seed trays. Six months on and still no success. *Eremophila maculata* has germinated sporadically even in the cooler months."

(I would suggest soaking the fruits for no more than 96 hours. By accident I soaked fruits of a rare endangered Hawaiian *Myoporum* for four days (instead of one) and had over thirty seedlings come up within a month – Ed.)

EREMOPHILA RACEMOSA – BACK FROM THE BRINK

Quite a few of the eremophilas that are widespread in cultivation like *E. nivea*, *E. microtheca* and *E. racemosa* are extremely rare and endangered in the wild. The latter species, for example, was known only from a small area east of Hyden where it occurred on disturbed roadside verges up to 15 km from a road junction. Although I have visited the area on about seven occasions in the last 20 years I have never located *E. racemosa* growing in natural undisturbed sites. Furthermore it is rarely found in populations of more than 5 or 6 plants so Guy Richmond and I were delighted in 1993 when we found a “large” population of 38 plants.

As it turned out this population was subsequently destroyed early the next year when a massive fire passed through the area followed soon after by road widening. Regeneration in the burnt areas following the 1994 fire have been spectacular. With the removal of the mallee canopy and tall understorey shrubs, small plants like *Eremophila*, *Anthocercis*, *Symonanthus* and various Myrtaceae, grasses and ephemerals have come up in abundance.

Earlier this year Guy was out in the area and found a population of *E. racemosa* which he estimated at between 1 and 2 million. He also brought back a vegetative eremophila which I could not identify.

On my return to Australia at the beginning of October I stopped off in Perth and Guy and I did a rapid trip to the area to see the *E. racemosa* population and locate the unidentified eremophila. We could not get into the large *racemosa* population because of a flooded track but we did find another small one of about 5,000 plants. Most of the plants were in late bud and there was quite a lot of colour variation. The yellow/cream variant recently introduced into South Australia was seen occasionally.

When we got to the site of the unidentified eremophila we found it in full flower. It turned out to be a new species which I had seen previously at Kings Park a couple of years earlier. When I was shown it at Kings Park I was non committal. I did not know whether it represented a single plant found in the wild (in which case it could be a hybrid) or one plant collected from a population. The population found consisted of many thousands of young plants up to 1 m high which had come up following the fire.

It is closely related to *E. viscida* with large shiny leaves, and yellow unspotted flowers and sepals. Very occasionally in the population we encountered a carmine spotted flower form which is much more striking. A number of plants are now establishing in Adelaide. It is likely that this species which I have tagged *E. “lucida”* will probably go straight on to the Rare and Endangered priority 1 list.

Other eremophilas were also abundant throughout the burnt out areas. *E. subfloccosa* which I have only seen as scattered plants in South Australia and Western Australia was up in the tens of thousands. I counted up to 16 plants per square metre. *Eremophila serpens* was likewise in the thousands at one location and two subspecies of *Eremophila densifolia* were forming dense ground covers at various locations.

What can we learn from this fire? Eremophilas like *E. racemosa*, *E. “lucida”*, *E. densifolia*, *E. subfloccosa* and *E. serpens* are fire response species which, after fire, regenerate in large numbers. After the canopy species recover and regenerate their canopies, species like these eremophilas will rapidly decline in numbers to small scattered populations and persist in disturbed sites on roadsides, tracks, clearings until the next major event occurs resulting in their resurrection.

Bob Chinnock

THANK YOU

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have contributed in some way to the running of the Study Group, and especially to those of you who have taken the time to write about your experiences for the benefit of the Study Group as a whole.

A sincere thank you is extended to the staff of the Herbarium at the Adelaide Botanic Garden. Our Newsletter is prepared and printed at the Herbarium, and it is only through their contribution that we are able to maintain our subscriptions at such a low amount.

To all members I wish you a very happy Christmas and look forward to the year ahead. Hope to see as many as possible at the ASGAP Conference in September here in Adelaide.

Articles by Colin Jennings unless otherwise stated.

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