

Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants  
**EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER No. 61**

May 1997

It seems some time since I prepared the last Newsletter, and we like many others have experienced a very dry period, during the last month, after some very hot weather during February. Fortunately the plants do not seem to have suffered too much, although the account for the water used was somewhat greater than that for the corresponding period for the past few years.

I asked for more material relating to growing eremophilas in pots in the last Newsletter, and I am pleased to say that I did get some response. Thank you to those who have taken the time to write and to pass on the information. I have written this up later in this issue.

If you have a RED dot on the top of your Newsletter this time, then you need to renew your subscription of \$2 per year before the end of June. If you wish to pay for a greater period of time, then I am happy to organise that for you. The next Newsletter will be sent out in August, and will only be sent to those who are financial. As a rule I will put the year(s) for which you are paid up on the receipts as I issue them; in this way you will be able to refer back to your receipt. I have some on the books who, since they have forgotten if they are financial or not, have sent me money two or sometimes three times in the one year – my memory is not that good at times either! Some are financial into the next century!

Current receipts for money received since the last Newsletter are enclosed with this one.

#### ASGAP CONFERENCE

Plans are well in hand for the ASGAP Conference to be held in Adelaide at Annesley College from 27 September to 3 October. If you are planning to attend the Conference, then might I suggest that you register your interest with the Conference Secretary as soon as possible, if you have not already done so. There is a very comprehensive list of speakers, and the functions associated with the Conference are sure to be very worthwhile and enjoyable.

Prior to the Conference the SA Region will be holding its Spring Show and Plant Sales and for those of you who are interested in obtaining some rather hard to get plants, and can take them home without problems from quarantine regulations etc. I suggest that this could be a good source of material. Last year something in excess of 25,000 plants were available, all raised by SA members of SGAP. *Eremophila* species numbered in the order of a hundred or so, including varieties, as well as some of the less commonly grown species.

I mentioned in the last couple of Newsletters that the Eremophila Study Group had been asked to prepare a floor display of eremophilas at the Show and sought your help in setting this up, and wherever possible to provide potted plants or cuts. I am pleased to say that I have had excellent feedback from both local and interstate members – I am sure that we will be able to put on a very educational as well as a colourful display.

To this end the following points may be of help to those of you who are able to assist:

- The SA Region SGAP Show and Plant Sale will be held at the Wayville Showgrounds, Goodwood Road, Wayville (entrance off Rose Terrace), in the Hamilton Hall.
- We will be able to get started on our display from about mid-day on the Thursday, 25 September. We will probably be able to work through until about 8 p.m. if necessary. I think that most of the work will be done on the following day, when plants will be put into place etc.
- Cut flowers will be able to be stored in buckets with a preservative until needed for benching, so if you arrive on Thursday or Friday they will still be OK.

I would appreciate it, if a bit closer to the Conference time, you could let me know what you will be bringing and when, so that I will have some idea how to programme it all together and not end up having to redo Thursday's work on Friday.

Colin Jennings

### STUDY GROUP SEMINAR

Bob Chinnock has arranged for the Lecture Room of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide to be available for us to use for our Seminar. We thank Bob and the Director of the Gardens for this.

The Seminar will be held on Saturday 4 October – the day after the ASGAP Conference finishes. Unfortunately this will prevent those of you who have booked to go on the Kangaroo Island post conference trip from attending, but I am afraid that no matter what we did we were not going to be able to accommodate everyone's request for a suitable date. There was no time available during Conference week.

The Seminar will start at 9 a.m. and conclude at 4 p.m. and will be for only the one day. Last time we were able to extend it to two days, but on this occasion, since it is so soon after a rather heavy week of conferencing, I am sure that we will be rather looking forward to a break. The opportunity to meet together was, however, too good to be missed despite the weariness we may be experiencing.

Now that you know the times and the date, could you please let me know by the end of August if you are planning to be at the seminar. We will cater for the number who indicate their intentions and to this end will ask for a \$5 registration fee to be paid on the day. This will cover hire of the facility and the meal etc. I am sure the funds will extend to cover any miscellaneous expenses incurred.

If you have any thoughts on the type of agenda items you would want, perhaps you could also let me know this, but as soon as possible, since I may have to organise someone to do what you ask for.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at either the conference or the seminar or both.

Colin Jennings

### WILDFLOWER SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The "Spring Fling" will be held at Perry House – Bold Park, on Sunday 14 September from 9.30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.

This will be an opportunity for those able to attend to enjoy the wildflowers and the birdlife, and to take part in guided walks through Perry Lakes and Bold park, as well as to view the displays and watch the demonstrations. For those interested Perry House is at 71 Ocean Drive, Floreat Park.

Colin Jennings

### EREMOPHILAS IN SAN DIEGO

Is San Diego good Eremophila country? Like so many other Australian plants, they should find that conditions here suit them very well. They have been grown in California for many years. That is not to say you will find them in everyone's garden. They are not widely grown and are limited to a few species. I will limit my comments to Eremophilas in Southern California, primarily in San Diego.

#### Growing Conditions

At about the same latitude as Perth the climate in San Diego is similar except that it is a lot drier. It is normally very sunny with over 3,000 hours per year. Rainfall, which occurs during the winter months, amounts to 250 mm per annum and every few years it may be less than half that amount. In contrast, Perth gets over three times as much. Average summer daytime temperatures near the coast are quite temperate, about 25°C, but only 20 km inland they are typically 6°–10°C higher. The highest temperatures occur not in summer but in fall when winds

off the land are heated by compression as they pass over the mountains. In addition to causing temperatures to rise to 40°C and above the winds tend to be very strong in exposed areas and occur with extremely low humidity levels. Winters are mild, with occasional nights dropping to 0°C in the valleys and 5°C higher on the hillsides. On rare occasions frost will occur even on those hillsides.

Soils are highly variable in this part of the world, mostly because of the combination of young mountains and resulting erosion patterns. There are areas with red lateritic soil that are similar (for a non-geologist) to those found in parts of Western Australia. There are also areas, such as my own, where soils are very sandy and overly a clay subsoil which in places is only 0.2 metres from the surface but usually is more than a metre deep. There is little humus content in soils around here, except in the river valleys.

### Plants grown

*E. maculata*, in both red and yellow forms is the most commonly grown species. It can be found in nurseries that deal with Australian plants but not in the larger nursery chains. It grows well and has few faults. On my dry soils it is not easy to establish the plant. It requires care and plenty of water for a year or until the roots have gone down well below the surface. Once established, it performs well and flowers during winter and spring.

*E. gibbifolia* and *E. drummondii* have not been successful with me. Over a five year period they barely grew and eventually died (of drought). They received water in summer twice weekly to keep them alive. I think the problem was that of establishing a deep root system.

*E. calorhabdos* was much more vigorous. In full sun it put out tall shoots that were covered with flowers. It is a great plant whose only problem was that rabbits liked it even more than I did.

*E. glabra* is accommodating gradually to these conditions, showing steady but slow growth and flowering well. We have both the felty-leaved (Oneyup?) as well as they typical species forms.

*E. nivea*, a recent acquisition, grows well but slowly. A young specimen planted in spring produced no new growth until the autumn rains arrived. Then the attractive new grey shoots appeared.

*E. racemosa* grows steadily and is easily propagated. So far it is a success here as well as in Los Angeles, about 200 km to the north.

### Cultivation summary

1. Plants growing here appear to be quite healthy. No diseases or fungi are present. The water has a pH of nearly 8 but there are no signs of chlorosis.
2. There are no insect pests. The only protection they need is from rodents.
3. Early establishment of these plants is critical to later growth. Plants that were planted in root-bound condition or were not given adequate watering in the first winter fail to become independent of the need for water in summer; plants more carefully treated have succeeded and require only limited attention.
4. It is easier to get them established in heavier soils than in sandy soils. I have given up trying to grow them on slopes where the drainage is even faster and rain accumulation less.
5. In comparison with other Australian Myoporaceae (*Myoporum montanum*, *M. parvifolium* etc.) they are generally slower to get started. The use of a shredded leaf mulch worked into the planting region appears to help them in these poor soils.

Having said all that the single biggest factor in growing them here is how they are treated in the first year. I am curious to know if this experience is different from those of Australian members. Much of the difficulty experienced in earlier years resulted from applying too literally the cultivation comments in "Australian Plants for Western Queensland". This is a short publication put out over ten years ago and references "The Use of Trees and Shrubs in the Dry Country of Australia". While directions on the establishment of acacias, mallees and melaleucas in arid areas of Australia turned out to work well here the same was not true for eremophilas. They simply required more attention as infants!

In fairness, my soil conditions are drier than most. Not only is the soil sandy but it contains fine sand grains. When the soil dries out it becomes like powder and is difficult to moisten. Humus does make that moistening process easier. In one garden I know (further north with double the rainfall, at least) where planting was done in good soil in a built-up bed with a heavy mulch the growth rate in the first year is much better than I have seen.

With the exception of *E. calorhabdos*, all plants here were grown from cuttings. The planting of seedlings was more successful, I believe, because they could send down long roots while young. Cutting-grown plants are now being watered in winter to encourage such root growth.

Once established, eremophilas in San Diego have proven to be very tough and tolerant of normal garden conditions (no rodents) and accept both a certain amount of neglect as well as care (being trimmed). They are not worried by either our dry or hot conditions. I suspect that there are a number of species that would do as well or better than those described above.

Andrew Wilson

### THE DOORALONG DUO

Last year Jim Thomson spoke at a meeting of the Central Coast Native Plant Group, (NSW). He wrote to me to let me know of the outcome and was very pleased to be able to report that all went well and that he was able to use information from past study Group Newsletters, written by Ken Warnes and that the slides which I lent him were of some help in the presentation.

When Jim returned the slides he included a newspaper cutting from the Central Coast *Senior*, December 1996. On the front page was a photograph of Jim and his wife Wilma in front of one of their eremophilas growing very well in their garden.

I will extract from the article a few key points to illustrate the way in which this active couple are promoting native plants and in particular eremophilas: of which they have over 60 plants established in their garden.

*"Retired Dooralong couple, Jim and Wilma Thomson cannot get enough eremophilas planted in their garden. The pair have been growing the Australian native plant for about 15 years after becoming members of SGAP. A friend initially introduced them to the group while they were living in Parramatta, and they later became involved in an interest group specially for the 'Emu Bush'.*

*The couple grew the plants in a suburban lot in Parramatta and have been propagating the plants on their three acre Dooralong property for the past four years.*

*The 'Emu Bush' has grown successfully on their Central Coast property, although the plants grow in somewhat more inhospitable sites in WA.*

*Their native garden has also been the subject of attention in gardening contests. With more than 50 varieties of native plants in it, the garden won the Wyong Shire Garden Award for a native garden in a homestead area with no town supply for two years in a row. Two water tanks are used on the property.*

*When they first moved onto the property there were only a few withered shrubs.*

*The plants are never trimmed, as the couple believe in leaving the native plants to grow as they would naturally. The couple are keen to preserve Australia's native plants in their own backyard, and believe every Australian should look at doing the same."*

Congratulations to Jim and Wilma. They have been very active members of the Study Group. No doubt you will have noted articles from or about them in the past Newsletters.

Colin Jennings

### KENNY PARK – MERBEIN (VICTORIA)

In a letter from Chris Strachan, she refers to this very good park in Merbein in which there is an established garden of eremophilas. Two long beds of an impressive variety of eremophilas are to be found here. All of the plants are very healthy and were flowering prolifically when she visited in September.

Chris was also very pleased to note the extent to which eremophilas have been used in street plantings at tourist attractions in Mildura, and in particular the landscaped gardens opposite the Rio Vista Mansion.

(I am sure that the enthusiasm for eremophilas in the Mildura region has come from the work done by Peter and Marion Land, 11th St, Mildura. They operate a very well stocked nursery, and can be relied upon to have a fine range of eremophilas – Colin).

### MORE POTTED EREMOPHILAS

#### Lyndal Thorburn – Queanbeyan, New South Wales

“A follow-up to the last Newsletter: I forgot to mention that we have had both *E. nivea* and *E. maculata* var. *brevifolia* (both grafted) growing successfully in pots for some time. *Eremophila nivea* tends to be a bit sparse, but it is healthy and flowers well and is now standing over 60 cm high. The *E. maculata* var. *brevifolia* has stayed small but is also very healthy. It always looks sick by the end of our frosty winters – lost leaves, with the remainder red from the cold – but it puts on spring growth and soon flowers.

Last autumn we planted *E. ionantha* in a tub, having lost one from frost before. The latest specimen is looking good, has been covered with purple flowers for two months (written in December). We also planted an *E. “Kalbarri Carpet”* in a tub in July and it doubled in size. Another of the same type was planted in the garden in a shadier spot and is not quite as compact.

P.S. We use garden loam for potting mix and never fertilise (were just slack!)”

#### Ted & Cynthia Beasley – Watson, ACT

(Ted and Cynthia have in recent times moved to the ACT, and decided not to write too soon about their successes or otherwise of growing eremophilas in pots in the ACT – they wanted to make sure that the plants would survive a Canberra winter.)

“We are happy to say that all of our potted plants survived the frosts, although they are being kept during winter along a warm, NE wall of the house.

In pots we are growing:- (I have extracted a number from the list provided – Colin)

*E. abietina* subsp. “*ciliata*”, *E. alternifolia*, *E. bignoniiflora*, *E. bowmanii*, *E. callorhabdos*, *E. clarkei*, *E. “crenulata”*, *E. duttonii*, *E. fraseri*, *E. granitica*, *E. interstans*, *E. latrobei*, *E. macdonnellii*, *E. nivea*, *E. platycalyx*, *E. racemosa*, *E. spectabilis* and two hybrids, *E. “prostrata”* × *E. goodwinii* and *E. polyclada* × *E. bignoniiflora*.”

#### Norma Boschen – Warracknabeal, Victoria

“I have *E. cuneifolia* still in a pot from the 1995 Conference in Ballarat. After a spell, from about January, it is about to flower again. It was a mass of flower and calyx in the spring. It is very frost tender in the garden. It flowers over a very long period. I have *E. “hygrophana”* growing in a pot; it is slow growing, but it flowers well. My *E. “mirabilis”* puts on a beautiful show in the spring.

I think that *E. “phyllopoda”* subsp. “*phyllopoda*” has potential – my plant has just been in flower; it is slow growing with large, strong pink flowers. My small plant of *E. “caespitosa”* is flowering at the moment (May). It has very attractive mauve flowers, small grey foliage. The plant is only six months old and is slow growing.”

### CUTTINGS AND THE LAW

Last year I sent off the usual requests for cuttings; up until now I have not had any problems, although occasionally the delivery time has been a lot greater than one would desire.

My wife and I had been out for the day and on returning home noticed a car pull away from the front of the house as we approached. As we got out of our car, this car reappeared and two suited males alighted, one asking if I was Mr Jennings, and as he did so took out an ID card from his pocket – it was clear that he was from the area CIB.

They had received a complaint from a mail exchange interstate that a package sent by me had been intercepted because “it had an odour similar to that of marijuana”, and that they had a warrant to search our premises in following up the complaint. To say the least we were both dumbfounded.

I assured them that I had sent a package of cuttings of garden grown eremophilas and that this was all that was in the package. Now, I have a large glasshouse at the back of our block of land and so it was not too long before they asked if they could “have a look around”, the first port of call being the said glasshouse. As it happened, one of the detectives worked for a well known nursery here in Adelaide before joining the force, so he knew what to “look for”.

Inspection complete, no marijuana plants or signs thereof, we returned to the back of the house when I remembered having put some cuttings of *E. microtheca* in the lot sent away. I went across to the plant, took a few sprigs and crushed them in the palm of my hand, taking the odorous hand to the nose of the detective, whereupon he recoiled and said something like “that’s probably the cause of the problem”. With that they left and to this day I have had no further contact. By the way, for those not familiar with common names, *E. microtheca* is sometimes known as the dingo bush since the crushed leaves have an odour not dissimilar to dingo’s urine.

I am interested to know how, after the package was opened by the postal authorities and inspected, that they did not recognise that there was no marijuana present, and that any follow-up was required. Interestingly the package was forwarded to the addressee, albeit a bit disorganised and with my labelling somewhat rearranged.

I have received a report from Bob Drummond, the member to whom the package was sent, and it seems that despite the interesting path taken, most of the material was OK, although Bob is still having some trouble trying to fit bits of names together. From this letter he wrote he seems to have done a good job with the jigsaw.

Also of interest is the fact that I sent five other packages of cuttings on the same day, each with a similar lot of eremophilas, and all with *E. microtheca* in them!!

Colin Jennings

### FROM YOUR LETTERS

#### *Bob Drummond – Langwarrin, Victoria*

“Cuttings were made as large as possible, trimmed of leaves and stems cleaned down with a scraper I made, to remove outer skin to the cambium layer. These were then placed into a liquid hormone for up to 20 minutes. Long square tubes were used to hold a peatmoss and sand fill. Stem cuttings were placed in the mix to within 25 mm of the bottom. Using foam fruit boxes with 48 tubes per box, cuttings were placed in a hot bed with an auto-mist spray. Heat and mist work automatically as required. The hot bed is 6 m long and 600 mm wide so I can fit quite a few tubes on a bench at a time. My biggest surprise and pleasure was when I pulled out the first tube at the end of the first week and found that the root was through the base of the 50 mm pot, quite a strong white root about 3 mm in diameter. *Eremophila weldii* was the first, with others coming in the second week. This caught me not ready to pot on; I did not have pots of mix ready, nor the space to put the plants.”

#### *Jim Thomson – Dooralong, New South Wales*

“Wilma and I have been growing eremophilas in pots, but in general they do not seem to do as well as their fellows in the garden. They tend to flower begrudgingly and die if given half a chance. Potting on time seems to be a weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth time, so I suspect, nay I am sure, that we could do things better and we read with interest the comments of more successful potters.”

## NURSERIES

From time to time I receive letters in which you mention nurseries where you have purchased eremophilas, and I have generally mentioned them in the Newsletter soon afterwards. I am sure that there are more nurseries around the country which can be relied upon to supply eremophilas, and I intend to prepare a list of those currently providing good service in this regard. I will try to get this published in the next Newsletter, provided I have enough feedback to make it worthwhile. An updated list is about due I think.

Colin Jennings

## DID YOU KNOW THAT?

- There are now in excess of 220 species of *Eremophila* known, a good number of these are yet to have their descriptions published, but already quite a few of them with unpublished names are in cultivation. Bob referred to one such species, with the tag name *E. "lucida"* in the last Newsletter, it is hoped that the few plants already in cultivation will grow sufficiently well to provide material for propagation next spring.
- Specific epithets often refer to some feature of the plant which is unique or can be used to distinguish it from others currently known. Here are a few to start with.

<i>alatisepala</i>	winged sepals
<i>caerulea</i>	deep blue
<i>calorhabdos</i>	after the genus of the same name – beautiful wand
<i>crassifolia</i>	thick leaves
<i>dichroantha</i>	two coloured flowers
<i>ericalyx</i>	woolly calyx
<i>gibbifolia</i>	humped or swollen leaves
<i>granitica</i>	growing on granite soil
<i>ionantha</i>	violet flowers
<i>miniata</i>	flame red (literally – painted with red lead) – of the flower
<i>maculata</i>	spotted or blotched – of the flower
<i>metallicorum</i>	of the miners – collected in the goldfields
<i>polyclada</i>	many branches – refers to the habit of the plant stems
<i>pterocarpa</i>	winged fruits
<i>scoparia</i>	broom like – refers to habit of the bush
<i>subfloccosa</i>	somewhat tufted and woolly
<i>virens</i>	green – refers to flower colour

Many names are written in honour of some person or location – I will look at some of these in the next Newsletter.

Colin Jennings

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