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Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants

EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER No. 85

June 2005

Firstly I must apologise for the delay in getting this issue finished. I have had good intentions since returning from overseas, however, the time required to do many things has cut into the time required to get this finished. I must also apologise to those of you who have written to me in the past few months and to whom I have had not, until recently responded.

There are several who requested cuttings and who have sent money to pay for their postage etc. I have not forgotten you. Unfortunately the best time to send them corresponded with the six weeks I was away. Please bear with me – I will supply them as soon as the rains come!!?? and when the plants have produced fresh growth.

The ASGAP Conference in Perth promises to be an excellent time to visit that part of the world. I have been told that the rain has fallen in the south-west region and that there should be a good display of wildflowers to view in the Stirling Ranges. I am not sure of the effects of the low rainfall in the wheat belt region and the central north, but suspect that growth could be limited and flowering reduced. Myrnie & I will be attending the Conference, arriving a few days before it commences and travelling north as far as C[illegible]ldton.

There was a suggestion that we might hold a workshop in WA if there was enough interest and if there was someone willing to do the organising etc. I am not sure where or when but if it was to be in the near Perth area, it could be on the Sunday or Tuesday of Conference week. There is a trip programmed as part of the Registration for the Conference on the Tuesday, but this might not affect local WA members unless they are part of the organising group. If there is any interest please let me know and I will see what can be arranged.

A special thankyou to Hans Griesser, an enthusiastic member of the Study Group, who has established a comprehensive collection of eremophilas in the Adelaide Hills and who has also put together a comprehensive photo library. Hans offered to organise the pictures for this issue and the outcome is our first attempt to get colour into the Newsletter. We may decide to alter the format later but this 'first' should help to provide members with a photographic record, at least of some of the less commonly seen eremophilas.

Special thanks to Ken Warnes for his article on the trip which he and Russell Wait made last August/September. The notes from Alan Lacey follow on from [illegible]me comments which I made in the last issue of the Newsletter re the use of hormones.

The Sydney Group has been meeting regularly and has been producing a number of very useful articles directed mainly at the small band of enthusiasts who meet in private homes several times each year. Charles Farrugia has coordinated this group. Congratulations on the outcomes! A summary of their recent presentation is included for all to read.

STUDY GROUP SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW DUE FOR THE 2005/6 YEAR.
RATES REMAIN AT $5 PER YEAR.
A RED STICKER INDICATES THAT YOUR SUBSCRIPTION IS NOW DUE

SHEATHERS' PROPERTY – YALLAROO

We live on the Northern tablelands of New South Wales, about 25km west of Armidale. Yallaroo is the name of our 65ha property. Our house and surrounding gardens are perched on a windswept hill at an altitude of 900m. Yallaroo was originally a grazing property and the windswept hill was a large sheep camp complete with a wide range of weeds.

We started planting our native gardens about ten years ago. The aim was to create a bushland garden using plants from every Australian state. The site, apart from the wind, is prone to medium frosts and frequent droughts. Most plants are propagated on site and planted close together. Planting holes accommodate two and sometimes three specimens (usually different species) and the holes are spaced about 50 to 75cm apart. The dense planting allows the plants to shelter and protect each other as well as providing havens for small native birds.

Eremophilas figure prominently in all our garden beds, with new species and varieties added with monotonous regularity. We have found that the majority of eremophilas have proved to be fast growing, free flowering, drought resistant, frost tolerant and bird attracting. The majority have also proved to propagate readily from cuttings; we do not plant grafted eremophilas.

Eremophila microtheca, *E. racemosa* and *E. calorhabdos* are the most difficult species to establish in our situation. *Eremophila denticulata* propagates very easily from cuttings. We often put pieces in a hole with other plants. About 80% of these pieces will take root in the planting hole.

The closest naturally occurring species to us is *E. debilis*. We found a population of this ground covering species about 10km west of Yallaroo.

Details of our horticultural adventure may be found on our website:
http://www.yallaroo.com.au

Warren & Gloria Sheather

FURTHER COMMENTS ON HORMONES FOR PLANT PROPAGATION
(From an Old Chemist.)

There is a common major problem - it is **SOLUBILITY,** both with the University of Queensland study (Grevillea Study Group Newsletter #69 October 5 2004), and their description of hormone solution preparation; **and** the use of powder preparations.

These synthetic hormones are relatively large organic molecules (weak organic acids) almost totally insoluble in water. Any dilution with water of an alcoholic solution m[illegible]n greater than approximately 1:1 (i.e. 50% alcohol) means that the active ingredient (the hormone) drops out of solution, i.e. becomes UNAVAILABLE for its intended purpose. Therefore, powders or wrongly diluted preparations of hormone may be better than nothing – BUT NOT MUCH!

An "active" water soluble ion maybe the answer. We can make a solution of say, the Sodium salt of either hormone acid – which will be water-soluble but still retain auxin activity. This is easily done by adding drop-wise a dilute sodium hydroxide solution (0.IM) to a 50% alcoholic solution of hormone acids, until approx. pH6 (or their pKa values). The pH is measured by a simple pH meter.

Alan Lacey

{A 0.1M solution of sodium hydroxide (caustic soda) is made by carefully dissolving 4g of the solid in 1L of distilled/deionised water. Caution! Always dissolve the solid by adding to the water – a large amount of heat is generated. Colin – another old chemist.}

THE WAIT/WARNES TRIP AUGUST 2004

The Wait/Warnes August 2004 Expedition travelled north to Alice Springs, west through the Macdonnell Ranges to the Sandy Blight Junction, south to Warrakurna Settlement near the Giles Weather Station, then split. The Warnes contingent returned via Erldunda while the Wait component headed further into W.A. In general the country was in good condition and we were able to make some good collections and selections, although nothing of particular scientific significance was found.

As we travelled north to make our second camp at Cadney Park the main spectacle was *E. rotundifolia* around Bulgunnia Corner. A heavy storm saturated the tents so while they dried out the next morning we drove through Mt. Willoughby Station to Copper Hills, one of the few locations for *E. verrucosa* ssp. *verrucosa.* In appearance it is like a "heavy" form of *E. scoparia* and is found along the stony creek lines. As usual it has proved very difficult to propagate. Large numbers of *E. freelingii, E. gilesii* were seen and an *E. neglecta*, yellow in both calyx and corolla, which failed to strike.

Back to the Stuart Highway and great stands of *E. neglecta* and some patches of *E. paisleyi* ssp. *paisleyi* among which were some good blues. We saw more large areas of *E. rotundifolia* which on our return a week later had increased their flowering even further. On the sandhills at Erldunda the *E. willsii* ssp. *willsii* were common. We arrived at our overnight destination, Rainbow Valley, just in time to witness a superb sunset lighting up the cliffs: if we had stayed longer at the *E. goodwinii* seen near the main road we would have missed the sunset.

Next morning we checked out the populations of *E.* 'prostrata' along the western boundary of the Park, extending well onto Stuart Creek Station. This is the Type Population and there is little variation although we were able to select some with larger flowers. These have rooted, been planted out, spread to 80cm across, flowered magnificently and died, all in 8 months. Fortunately we have some less precocious stock still to plant. We suspect that *E.* 'prostrata' may maintain an underground crown that enables this rapid growth because in some years it is not to be found, other years it covers large areas and gives the appearance of not being first year plants. To date no-one has kept it alive for long enough to establish a crown, if that is its nature. We found one plant that we suspect is a hybrid with *E. goodwinii* although none

were seen in the immediate area. It has propagated well. We did not see any hybrids with *E. willsii* which have been collected there in the past.

We had originally planned to cross over to the Chamber's Pillar area to search for *E.*' prostrata' reported from there but time lost earlier precluded this. It would not to be easy to find as it really is prostrate, so that's for another time.

Replenish supplies and despatch the first cuttings in Alice Springs then straight out onto the Larapinta Drive through the West Macdonnell Ranges. *Eremophila christophorii* was seen in many spots and is a species which should be more widely grown. It strikes well, grafts very easily, is shapely, long flowering and available in lavender, white or pink. A widened road cutting since my only previous trip solved the mystery of why no-one had been able to find a white flowered form collected in 1974. Plenty of blue but the white had gone. Nearly to our overnight destination of Redbank Gorge we did see a large white flowered form and after some searching, a glorious pink one. Both pink and white are available in Alice Springs but this one was much larger flowered. Watch for "Pink Alice", (not my name), it's a beauty.

As we rounded the end of the Ranges and headed towards Papunya we lost the eremophilas to a large extent apart from *E. gilesii* and *E. latrobei* which was quite variable. These two are very widespread. Towards Sandy Blight Junction the first *E. forrestii* ssp. *turtonii* (syn. ssp. *forrestii* Ed.) appeared. They must have been flowering for a long period as the fruiting calyces extended well down the stem. This species was with us for many kilometres and appears to be responsive to burning of the country. Several collections made, total result, one plant! Long may it grow! Some of the *E. latrobei* with silvery-white foliage and large red flowers were very showy and the first are in the ground.

Southwards on the Sandy Blight Junction Road we detoured in to the base of Mt. Leisler and found three large colonies of *E. tietkensii* on stony ground. (*E. tietkensii* is the accepted name for what we have been growing under the name *E.* 'pachomai'. Ed.) This must be very close to where the type material was collected but the locality names didn't appear on our maps. However, Tietkens blazed a large bloodwood, presumably at a campsite and 100m away is a large population. As usual there was considerable variation and it was possible to make selections of good colours in both calyx and corolla.

E. willsii ssp. 'integrifolia' became more common as we travelled south, especially around the Border country, then between the Sir Frederick and Walter James Ranges we found two stands of *E. glabra* which we collected for Bob Chinnock, and ourselves. *Eremophila platythamnos* ssp. *platythamnos* grew further on and I was able to select a form I had wanted for years, one which holds the lemon coloured calyx in large numbers after the purple corolla drops. It has great potential but will almost certainly require grafting for growing on most soils.

On the stony hills adjacent to the gully hiding the Bungabiddy Rockhole we found *E. elderi.* It was on the harshest, most exposed rock faces and must be incredibly hardy. Upright with few stems, white flowers with red throat markings and very sticky, they are amazing plants. Limited numbers have been propagated but I expect it to be difficult when winter comes. Full sun and no weeds!

We stayed with friends in the Warrakurna Settlement and were guided to some of the private home-lands over the next few days. We travelled towards Warburton, then we bush-bashed along an almost non-existent track to "Eunice's Country". Narrow leaved *E. duttonii, E. oppositifolia* loaded with cream calyces, and a few plants of a good *E. clarkei,* which struck. This country was dry and it was sobering to know that Gibson perished probably not far from here. The next day we travelled on a good road along the north side of the Rawlinson Range through a beautiful sandplain full of flowering plants including lots of good *E. willsii* ssp. 'integrifolia' to the Yirrira waterhole and found much of interest. *Eremophila forrestii* had reverted to a different subspecies and grew in mixed populations with soft grey-leaved *E. latrobei.* Where *E. forrestii* was dominant we found an apparent hybrid with characteristics of that species but where *E. latrobei* prevailed we found a "swarm" of hybrids. There were dozens of plants which appeared to be hybrids, but there was considerable variation among them.

Question.! Were they all first-cross, i.e. F1 hybrids, or were they next generation seedlings and what had prompted such a mass germination? The answer to the last Question was probably natural conditions because a little further on we came to an extensive area of what we called a broad leaved form of *E.* 'acrida' but may be a sub-species of *E. elderi* which Bob had asked us to look out for. They were about 1m high and wide with soft, broad, thin-velvety leaves with obvious perforations when back-lit, highly aromatic and medium sized soft blue flowers. They grew on a stony rise. When we climbed the hills behind the waterhole, "silly white fellers" our Aboriginal women guides called us, we found a few more of this species growing in conjunction with *E. hughesii,* a wispy, spindly species with small blue flowers and totally unrelated. Amazingly these two had also hybridised, talk about an overfed corgi breeding with an under-nourished whippet! This solved a question arising some years before when a parcel of cuttings sent from Giles contained material which Peter Hall and I guessed was *E.* (*goodwinii* x *hughesii*) even though we had no record of *E. goodwinii* from out there. *Eremophila goodwinii, E.* 'acrida' and *E. elderi* are all related so it wasn't a bad guess, although the two grew together the seed source would be *E. hughesii* because on the next hill I found two more

growing among *E. hughesii* but I had to use my nose to find the *E.* 'acrida' some 50m away. I did say they were aromatic. On another trip to the top of a lookout hill Russell again spotted the same hybrid growing on the bank of a small creek. Neither parent was in the immediate vicinity but the fruit could have been washed there. After I left for home Russell went back and found *E. hughesii* not far away. So that weird hybrid is far from unusual around Giles.

Our time was up so we headed for home along the Great Central Road. More *E. elderi* near Lassiters Cave, copious numbers and variations in *E. latrobei* especially approaching Kata Tjuta and around Uluru, superb *E. neglecta* around Curtin Springs, *E. gibsonii* near the Mt. Connor lookout and those beautiful blue mounds of *E. rotundifolia* north of Marla. On the north bank of Dresley Creek was a pure white *E. rotundifolia* but its value was in the novelty, the blue were far superior.

Not all species seen have been listed or propagated but it was a good trip.

***Eremophila* "Winann", yet another hybrid.**

On a recent visit to the Goodwinii Nursery at Stirling North, near Pt. Augusta, I was taken by Denise and Geoff Winning to a patch of remnant vegetation where I was shown a plant which they couldn't place. Growing among and adjacent to *E. longifolia* it was of similar size, suckered, but had narrower leaves and smaller pink flowers with very small calyx (c.f. *E. stenophylla).* A single *E. scoparia* must be the pollen provider as it was the only other species found, despite a long search. This *E. scoparia* was itself a bit different in that it was of stiff upright habit and had several suckers which appeared to be voluntary. I have never seen suckers with *E. scoparia* before.

The nursery has struck the plant from cuttings and the chosen name is derived from a combination of Winning and Ann Gibbs who found the plant. It has some horticultural potential but is mainly of interest to collectors. Perhaps under better conditions it will be a useful screening or specimen plant.

Ken Warnes

EREMOPHILAS IN SYDNEY

Written by members of the Eremophila Study Group – Sydney Branch

Over the last eighteen months a group of enthusiasts has been meeting regularly in Sydney to exchange information on growing eremophilas. These locally based members of the ASGAP Eremophila Study Group, with the full support of the Study Group Leader, Colin Jennings, decided to get together and pool their knowledge to learn more about one of Australia's most desirable genera. Hence the Sydney Branch of the Study Group came into being.

In the words of the coordinator, Charles Farrugia: "The Sydney Branch was formed to promote this beautiful and hardy genus, especially in the dry conditions experienced in the last three years. It has been proved by our members that well-established eremophilas can survive with very little or no water for prolonged periods. Throughout the drought, no losses of well-established plants have been reported by members."

The Sydney Branch had its initial meeting in October 2003, and meets three times a year. One member travels all the way from Dubbo, and another from the Blue Mountains. Others come from various suburbs of Sydney.

At meetings, members discuss cultivation methods, successes, failures, soil conditions, potting mix, mulch, propagation techniques, pruning, reaction of their plants to weather conditions, and many other topics. Mini-workshops on propagation and grafting have been held. Minutes recording the information are published in the Study Group newsletter. Despite the structured look, meetings are relaxed and fun.

Members have found that eremophilas will thrive in the various soil types found in their gardens as long as a few basics are followed. A warm, sunny, well-drained position is best. Poor soils should be improved by organic matter, and will benefit from application of fertilizer. Some members use light-coloured reflective gravel as mulch to provide more warmth.

In Sydney, trials have shown that a range of species will grow adequately on their own roots. However, some species originating from the more arid areas of the continent need to be grafted, because they cannot cope with the higher rainfall and humidity of the east coast. Grafting is carried out using *Myoporum* sp. as rootstock, and is a proven way of greatly extending the range of species that can be grown in Sydney.

Eremophilas are fairly low-care plants. After a little watering when first planted, tip pruning when young and occasionally later to maintain the shape of the plant, that's about it – just stand back and watch them grow. They are very fast growing. Now and again a certain species may suffer die back to its foliage during humid weather, which should be cut back, and the plant usually recovers

The most experienced grower of eremophilas in Sydney is undoubtedly Noel Gane. Noel has specialised in eremophilas for a long time, and freely passes on the benefit of his vast knowledge at the branch get-togethers, and as guest speaker at Australian Plants Society meetings. His outstanding garden at East Hills has been featured in *Australian Plants* magazine.

Noel grows the smaller species of eremophila. He has improved the soil by adding horse manure, affectionately known as "Condell Park caviar", obtained from a local horse stable housing thoroughbred trotters, and he regularly feeds his plants a liquid fertilizer made from the same exotic product.

Noel's tip for beginners is: - try the many forms of *Eremophila maculata*. They are hardy and reliable and are generally easy to propagate.

Gordon Brooks is another enthusiast, and his Castle Hill garden boasts an excellent variety of eremophilas, many obtained from nurseries on trips to South Australia and Queensland. Gordon notes that they prefer a deep soil with some body but reasonable drainage. At his place, where the roots cannot get down far because of the Hawkesbury Sandstone base, they require a little more water, and, like Noel, he adds manure.

Gordon suggests the most reliable for beginners to try around Sydney are probably *E. maculata* (all forms), *E. glabra* (most forms though not the one from Canning Stock Route), *E. alternifolia* (all forms), *E. laanii*, *E. latrobei* (several forms are now available and seem OK), *E. longifolia, E. macdonnellii* (all forms although some are short lived - say 2 years), *E. oppositifolia* (all forms), *E. racemosa* (all colour forms) and *E.* "Big Polly" (*bignoniiflora* x *polyclada*), *E.* "Summertime Blue", and *E.* "Yanna Road".

Some others that show considerable promise include *E. decipiens, E.* 'lanceolata', *E. nivea, E. oldfieldii, E. tetraptera, E. weldii* and *E. youngii.*

Eremophila literally means "desert-loving". The genus is endemic to Australia, and occurs in the arid and semi-arid regions of all mainland states. Over 250 species are recognized, as well as a number of hybrids. They grow in a variety of soils, favouring those which are neutral to alkaline, some in heavy clays subject to periodic flooding after irregular rains. In general the climate of their habitat is harsh, typically with very hot summers and long dry periods, sometimes up to two years without rain.

The only eremophila occurring naturally in the Sydney region is the prostrate *Eremophila debilis*, which can be found on the Cumberland plain.

Eremophilas are one of Australia's most diverse groups of plants. They come in various forms, from prostrate ground covers, to small and large shrubs and small trees. Many species are beautiful and ornamental, displaying a profusion of showy tubular flowers over long periods. Flower colour ranges through blue, violet, mauve, purple, red, yellow, cream, green, and white. The foliage itself is often a feature, with so many textures, and subtle variations of colour. Some of the grey leaf forms are outstanding. Eremophilas give the impression of being "happy" plants, due to the simple but strong-coloured flowers and often contrasting foliage.

One of the benefits of membership of the Eremophila Study Group is access to plants and cutting material. Given that it is rare to find eremophilas for sale in Sydney nurseries, members obtain them by exchanging plants and cutting material with other members, and by organising bulk orders from interstate nurseries, which arrive in good condition. Leader of the Study Group, Colin Jennings, is willing to send cutting material from Adelaide.

The Sydney Branch of the Eremophila Study Group believes eremophilas can be grown in Sydney, and is interested in attracting new members. If you would like to learn more about eremophilas and attend local meetings, contact Ian Cox by phone on 9654 2533 or email itcox@bigpond.com

The following articles have been extracted from the lengthy report received from Charles re the activities of the Sydney Group. I welcome their keenness and have passed on many of their findings and reports in this issue for us all to appreciate

PLANTS IN POTS

I have some experiences maintaining (or not) eremophilas in pots.
Successful so far -
E. divaricata going well in a hot spot, doesn't mind sitting in a saucer often full of water (well, it is a floodplain plant), although I'm wondering if this contributes to some dieback of woody parts, or is it just my pruning technique/timing.

***E.* "Summertime Blue"** - also in a hot spot with plenty of water. It would be interesting to see how little water can maintain these plants in these conditions. It will also be interesting to see whether *E.* "Summertime Blue" outgrows its pot, needs root pruning and repotting etc to maintain it.
E. brevifolia, hot spot. No saucer. Responds well to pruning.
E. pterocarpa, part shade.
E. willsii* ssp. *integrifolia (grafted - have just planted it out after doing well in a pot for three years- interesting to see whether it ever flowers profusely) has a few flowers over most of the year, part shade - in pot and planted out.
***E.* 'glandulifera'** (grafted), not a really robust plant, Flowers sparsely - a large pink flower. This, like some others, is in a pot still after three years because I didn't want to risk planting it out till I had propagated more. Will try to bring some of this material down - there wont be much so I'll be hoping someone who has had some success grafting or striking difficult species will take it on. This would help to preserve the variety of species we as a group have collected.
E. rostrata (grafted) long flowering over winter & spring.
Various forms of ***E. oppositifolia*** great for flowering when small, have kept some in pots for several years.

Wouldn't recommend ***E. nivea,*** although I had a white flowering one growing and flowering well before it was planted out. The blue 'niveas' I've tried - I probably mollycoddled them - If I try them again, it'll be full exposure to the elements, and maximum air circulation!

There is a lovely display of happy looking 'niveas' in built containers (i.e. brick walls, raised) outside Dubbo post office. From their size, about 0.7m, I would have thought they'd have flowered this season, but I'm still waiting for the blaze of blue.

Helen Lane

E. bignoniiflora* ssp. *polyclada – when planted in the ground this plant grows to 4m but I have had this plant in a pot for about 4 years and it has only grown to about a metre. This plant has never been pruned, repotted or fed; watered once a week it flowers for long periods at a time.

***E.* "Summertime Blue"** – this plant was planted with the above plant and it grew to about 0.5m
***E. (racemosa* x *maculata), E. racemosa, E. microtheca, E. maculata* "Blue Thunder"** – these plants were in pots for about 3 years, again very neglected apart from watering. They flowered very well throughout this period. They are now planted in the garden and doing very well.

Charles Farrugia

EREMOPHILAS IN SYDNEY

The Good News

Gloria and I have been delighted with the way most of our eremophilas have withstood the dry summer. We have learnt a lesson – though the ground may be dry our eremophilas will manage and probably do better without extra water.

I can't fault the well-known *E. maculata*, *E. racemosa* and *E. glabra*. All forms grow well and reliably. Even *E. glabra* (Canning Stock Route) seems to have grown well this summer – presumably because it has had less water than before.

E. macdonnellii has been a favourite of ours for some years. All forms are easily struck but tend to be somewhat short lived in our garden, may be only two years. Because it has been so easy to strike, I have never attempted to graft it to learn whether it will have a longer life. An upright pink form is doing well but the flowers of the purple forms, green or grey leaves, prostrate or upright, seem larger.

Both *E. oppositifolia* and *E. alternifolia* appear to be hardy and to have a range of colour forms.

We have attempted to grow *E. calorhabdos* for many years, always finding lower leaves died back and the plant lost its vigour. We purchased a plant from the SA Forestry Commission two years ago and have a beauty which I have continually tip-pruned. It is nearly 2m high and preparing to flower again. This is cutting grown and clearly does not need to be grafted.

I believe that *E.* 'lanceolata', one of the new ones, is a real beauty and that it will become well known in the near future. It is small, perhaps to 0.6m x 1m, carries deep mauve flowers for a very long period and has attractive dark green, lanceolate leaves. I have struck it from cuttings which are flowering already.

The first *E. tetraptera* that we planted died back until we had little more than three or four short branches with an odd leaf or two. Suddenly it began to grow and has not looked back. Subsequent plantings have presented no problem. This

species may grow to 3m although ours are barely 1m at this stage. The plant has dusky red flowers. If there is a problem, it may be its untidiness, as branchlets do tend to go every which-way. I have grafted one and struck another one or two.

A few years ago I understood *E. latrobei* was a difficult species to grow. I am discovering that at least some forms are easy here in Sydney. The green leaf forms seem great, including the Siam Station form which is a creamy-orange in colour. Most are shades of red. The species can reach 3m but some forms are only about 1m. Fortunately they generally do not spread much and they can be grown from cuttings.

Although it has been known for many years, *E. freelingii* is new to me. I am delighted with its progress although it is still far from mature. Literature suggests that it may reach 3m x 3m but can be as small as 1m x 1m. It is wide-spread in all mainland states (except Victoria) and the NT. Ours is a lavender flowering form but it may be white. Leaves may be up to 8cm long, a bit sticky and a little hairy. I suspect this may need to be grafted rather than propagated by cutting but I have not tried yet.

I have had no previous experience with *E. pentaptera* but the plant we bought last year has grown quickly and remains healthy. It is prostrate and grows to 0.5m x 1m with mauve flowers. I cannot yet report on propagation options.

One that has surprised me is *E.* 'warnesii', which carries a dense array of large grey leaves. I would have expected it to be an ideal target for fungal attack in humid weather. I believe it will grow to 0.6m x 1.5m although I have seen little data on this species. I suspect it may require grafting but I have not tried cuttings yet.

I am very interested in *E.* 'lucida' which I saw growing at the Goodwinii Nursery, Stirling North, SA. Our present plant is growing nicely and is apparently healthy. It is a red flowering form although I understand that there is a cream flowering form also. It has relatively large, sticky leaves and may yet prove to be unreliable in our Sydney humidity. This may be a candidate for grafting because of the sticky leaves.

Our red form of *E. georgei* flowers heavily but tends to send out shoots that give it a most untidy appearance. I will withhold judgment on it for another season. The mauve form is not as vigorous and, at this stage, cannot be recommended for Sydney. Neither form has been easy to propagate from cuttings and probably require grafting.

One very small, prostrate species, *E.* 'veneta', grows to only 10 – 20cm and it does have some leaf die-back when stems touch the ground. Its silver-blue flowers are unusual. I have succeeded in striking this and hope others may be able to try it.

The Not So Good News

We have had to prune our *E. santalina* heavily because it was drooping across our access path. If anyone wants a very pretty, small tree or large shrub, this may be the one to choose. It may grow to 6m although is sometimes less. It has white flowers in spring. Unfortunately, I have had limited success with this as a cutting. I have succeeded in striking this on several occasions but then lost all while growing them on. I don't know whether I allowed the plants to dry out, gave them too much water or failed them in some other way.

We have lost an *E. enata* that is another small, attractive shrub and the remaining bush is not as happy as we should like. I am hoping we can find a solution for this one as, like *E.* 'lanceolata', it is most floriferous and can fit into any garden.

Another to show some distress is a grafted *E.* 'glandulifera'. It flowers well (soft pink) but then suffers from die-back of some branchlets. It may grow to 1.5m x 1m and could be grown in most gardens. It is from WA and has a grey, hairy leaf so may be susceptible to our Sydney humidity.

E. 'splendens' appears to drop its lower leaves leaving a somewhat woody small shrub. However, it presents a change of appearance with its reddish-orange flowers and small, grey ovate leaves and would be a worthy plant for any garden if a hardy form can be found. It only reaches about 1m. I suspect it may need to be grafted although I have struck it.

E. spectabilis is also not as healthy as we should like. Both northern and southern forms have very large flowers and are most attractive but tend to show leaf die-back, presumably from humidity, even though they are grafted. It will be worth watching closely for a while longer.

Gordon Brooks

EREMOPHILAS IN SYDNEY

It's not all that easy. If you find an eremophila you can't resist at a nursery somewhere and take it home, the chances are that your garden is not the best place for it. By "home" I mean here at Kenthurst. With the hazards of summer humidity, winter cold and frost, unaccustomed rainfall, shade from trees (hence less hours in the sun), strange soil with different pH, inadequate soil depth (we are on shallow sandstone), it's surely an alien environment. Remember, only one species grows naturally in the Sydney Basin!

So you have this plant and want to grow it way outside of its natural conditions. For the plant, it will be like being in a prison on the wrong side of the Sandstone Curtain (Great Dividing Range). Probably worse than that – at least prisoners usually survive!

However, all is not lost. With trial and error – mainly error – we have found a few eremophilas that **will** survive in our garden. Actually they do more than survive – they grow quickly and flower happily for many months. Noel Gane has found more than just a few. But Noel has a magic touch and has been at it for a good many years. Among these tough survivors are most forms of *E. maculata* and *E. glabra*, *E. racemosa* and *E. decipiens*.

Getting back to the afore-mentioned plant, if it's new (i.e. you haven't grown it before), and if you really would like to maximise its chances of passing on its genes in your garden, I would try grafting it as soon as it is big enough to yield satisfactory-sized grafting material. In any case I would plant it in the sunniest part of the garden with the deepest soil, and fertilise it heavily (remember that sandstone!). Many a time, usually when self-congratulations are due because you think your expertise in growing eremophilas is working a treat, the plant keels over.

Because of past failures and all the uncertainty, I generally try to obtain grafted eremophilas for our garden, or else endeavour to graft them myself.

I have noticed that quite a few eremophilas that grow on their own roots seem to have more vigour and last longer if grafted, for example *E. nivea*, *E.* "Yanna Road", *E. gilesii*, *E. macdonnellii*, *E. oldfieldii*, and *E. subfloccosa*.

Incidentally, when I first tried *E. nivea* some years ago, I consistently lost it around November or December each year when the humidity commenced. This happened whether the plant was grafted or ungrafted. Now, this problem does not occur. Could this be because the plants are more acclimatised, or because a more resistant form is used?

Ian Cox

EREMOPHILAS FOR STARTERS IN SYDNEY

I have suggested that the following eremophilas are the hardiest in Sydney.

E. maculata (all forms), *E. glabra* (most forms though not the one from Canning Stock Route), *E. alternifolia* (all forms), *E. laanii*, *E. latrobei* (several forms are now available and seem OK), *E. longifolia, E. macdonnellii* (all forms although some are short lived - say 2 years), *E. oppositifolia* (all forms), *E. racemosa* (all colour forms) and *E.* "Big Polly" (*bignoniiflora* x *polyclada*), *E.* "Summertime Blue", and *E.* "Yanna Road".

Some others that show considerable promise include *E. decipiens, E.* 'lanceolata', *E. nivea, E. oldfieldii, E. tetraptera, E. weldii* and *E. youngii.*

I think the plants in the primary list can manage on their own roots and that very likely those in the secondary list can too.

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