

AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANTS SOCIETY (Australia) Inc.

EPACRIS STUDY GROUP

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NEWSLETTER

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Greetings to all Epacris Study Group members.

What a strange summer it has been in Australia, particularly for those living in the eastern states, which is the stronghold of *Epacris* plants.

Our thoughts are with those who are currently experiencing weather extremes including floods in many areas. Our gardens certainly appreciate good natural rainfall, but sometimes it is just too much !

Another area of major concern in eastern Australia is the spread of Myrtle Rust on our native plants. Myrtle Rust (*Uredo rangeli*) is a serious fungal disease native to South America. It was first detected in Australia in New South Wales in early 2010 and has since become widespread on the eastern seaboard of New South Wales and in south-eastern Queensland. In late 2011 the disease was also discovered in Victoria.

Myrtle Rust affects plants in the Myrtaceae family which of course includes our very important genera of *Agonis*, *Angophora*, *Callistemon*, *Eucalyptus*, *Leptospermum* and *Melaleuca* to name just a few. A major difficulty is that the fungal spores are very easily spread. They can be carried by wind, insects, birds and animals including humans.

While our *Epacris* plants are unlikely to be affected it is vitally important that we all avoid spreading Myrtle Rust by not going into known contaminated sites and by contacting our state Department of Primary Industries if we think we have discovered a new outbreak. We should also avoid any movement of plants from contaminated zones to our own gardens.

Further information plus images and updates can be found at -
Biosecurity - <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/plant/myrtle-rust/resources>

In this Newsletter we do not have our regular species Profile Page, but instead have included an article entitled 'Some Musings on Edible Heaths' written by Lenore Lindsay of Rockhampton for the ANPS Australian Food Plants Study Group. Lenore has been researching this topic for some time and an article in our Autumn 2010 Epacris Study Group Newsletter included a request for members to send any relevant information to Lenore. Our Study Group is acknowledged in the third paragraph of the article reprinted here.

For many Epacris Study Group members this will be the last Newsletter received via Australia Post, as we will be able to offer an email alternative from October 2012. Further details are on page 3.

Greetings for now, and happy gardening,

Gwen E.

News & Notes



Epacris longiflora

Growing *Epacris* in New South Wales

In our last Newsletter we included an item from **Gwyn Clarke** relating information on the growing of *Epacris* in Canberra.

Gwyn and Geoff moved to Kungala in New South Wales in 2009 and into a brand new house with a brand new garden. They have continued their interest in the growing of *Epacris* there, as indicated below.

“Our new garden is being established on a sandstone ridge surrounded by dry sclerophyll woodland. Our ridge is 176m above sea level and is frost free although in lower areas we have frost.

Geoff has improved the soil and increased the depth. There is good subsoil moisture to date as we have had good rains lately. 2009 - 1700mm. 2010 - 1350mm. 2011 - 940mm (to Sept.) and we often have good rain in November and December. Our average rainfall is 1000mm.

Epacris pulchella is growing in the bush on our block and we have recently planted *Epacris longiflora*. We planted *Epacris longiflora* on the eastern side of our large rockery. It is close to a sandstone slab, has been in the ground since April and is doing well.

I also have *Epacris reclinata* in a pot. Recently (August) it started flowering and I am hoping that in the damp sites of the rockery I will find a spot it will grow. I am also looking forward to keeping more detailed records of flowering.

Just a couple of weeks ago we visited a wet heath site where *Epacris obtusifolia* and *Epacris microphylla* were both in full flower but *Epacris pulchella* had only one flower. Our experience on the block with *Epacris pulchella* is that it comes into bud in April then has quite a long flowering time with flowers finally fading in July. During the warm wet late spring/summer it may put on a flowering show for a short time after rain periods.

I will also be on the lookout for other *Epacris* species to add to my collection.

Gwyn also provided the following information on propagation of *Epacris* from cuttings while they were in Canberra.

<i>Epacris longiflora</i>	Feb;/March	Hormone IBA 500 ppm/NAA 500 ppm	Mist Bed	80-100% success
<i>Epacris longiflora</i> white	April	Hormone IBA 1000ppm	Mist bed	80% success
<i>Epacris reclinata</i>	Late Jan/Feb	Hormone IBA 500ppm /NAA 500 ppm	Mist Bed	100% success
<i>Epacris microphylla</i>	December	Hormone IBA 2000ppm	Mist bed	76% success
<i>Epacris impressa</i>	Jan	Hormone IBA 500 ppm/NAA 500 ppm	Mist Bed	50% success
	March	Hormone IBA 500 ppm/NAA 500 ppm	Mist Bed	80% success

*Thanks so much to Gwyn for this contribution to our Newsletter.
All such items are of considerable interest to us all and are warmly welcomed.*

Future developments for the EPACRIS STUDY GROUP

For many Study Group members this will be the last hard-copy Newsletter to be received. Members will still be able to choose to receive copies via Australia Post, but there will also be advantages for those who select to have their Newsletters sent by email.

Modern technology now provides us with the option of producing our Newsletters electronically with the following advantages -

- It is relatively easy to include much more colour at little or no extra cost
- There is not the need to print and collate Newsletters prior to posting.
- Postage costs are eliminated.
- Reduced costs will enable Newsletters to also be sent to APS regional groups and also botanical and educational institutions free of charge
- Newsletters can be easily stored by receivers.
- Subscription rate for Study Group members will be able to be considerably reduced.
- Email communication will enable comments and items of interest to be sent to the Study Group Leader with maximum ease.

At the present time it is anticipated that our study group joining fee will remain the same as at present - ie \$5 per year for Australian members or \$10 p.a. for overseas members.

For current members who choose to receive future Newsletters by email it has been decided to extend membership, at no extra charge, through to 2015.

If you have already submitted your email address it is listed below -

Please check that this address is current and correct.

If no email address is above or if it is NOT correct, please contact Gwen Elliot at gwenelliott@optusnet.com.au.

If you do not wish to receive future Newsletters electronically you can simply continue your membership as previously or contact Gwen at P.O. Box 655, Heathmont 3135. Phone 03) 9879 1427.

For those wishing to renew membership by the traditional method, a renewal form is below.

Epacris Study Group Membership form.

A.P.S./ S.G.A.P. members, households or regional groups, Educational and Research Institutions can belong to the Epacris Study Group for **\$5.00 per year (or \$10 for 2 years)** renewable in July each year

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....POSTCODE.....

Phone..... E-mail.....

Region of APS/SGAP Membership

Payment enclosed \$ Please make cheque or money order payable to Epacris Study Group and post to Mrs. Gwen Elliot, P.O. Box 655, Heathmont 3135

News & Notes

The Importance of supporting our Australian Plant nurseries

Many of us are familiar with the song 'Big Yellow Taxi' which is perhaps better known for the line - "They paved paradise and put up a parking lot". A significant phrase in the song relates to the true fact that often "You don't know what you've got til it's gone", and it is perhaps very important to keep this in mind when we are shopping around for plants for our gardens.

A number of retailers, including plant nurseries, are experiencing difficult times at the moment, and we can certainly assist them to stay in business if we give them our support.

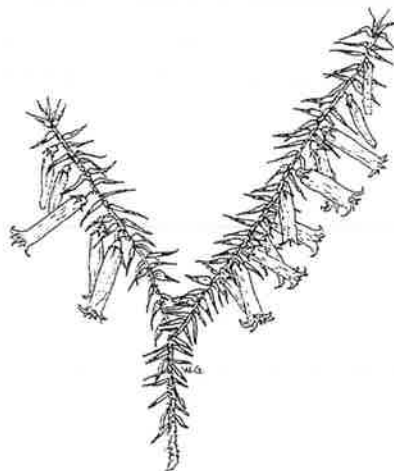
Plants of *Epacris* are often available from local Shire Council nurseries or other nurseries specialising in indigenous plants and also from some of the nurseries specialising in Australian plants, but they are extremely rare in the large chain stores or box store nurseries. If it wasn't for Australian plant nurseries it could well be that *Epacris* plants would simply be unavailable commercially. This also applies to many other Australian plants, not just *Epacris*.

I am personally familiar with the range of *Epacris* at Kuranga Native Nursery in Mt. Evelyn Victoria, as I am a part-time employee there working one day per week. They propagate an exciting range of *Epacris* species including *Epacris acuminata*, *E. barbata*, *E. breviflora*, *E. calvertiana*, *E. calvertiana* var. *versicolor*, *E. coriacea*, *E. exserta*, *E. gunnii*, *E. gunnii* double-flowered form, *E. impressa* - over 15 different selections, *E. lanuginosa*, *E. longiflora* including red & white, salmon pink, white and dwarf forms, *E. microphylla* white and pink forms, *E. mucronulata*, *E. myrtifolia*, *E. 'Nectar Pink'*, *E. obtusifolia*, *E. paludosa*, *E. petrophila*, *E. pulchella* and also *E. pulchella* prostrate, *E. purpurascens*, *E. reclinata*, *E. serpyllifolia* and *E. tasmanica*.

If you know of nurseries stocking a good range of *Epacris* in your region please let us know, as it is very helpful if members can know where plants are able to be obtained. We will be happy to pass on this information via the Study Group Newsletter.

Many of us do our own propagation from cuttings, but cutting material is not always readily available from our own gardens or those of friends, so being able to purchase plants from nurseries is vitally important.

Let's not wait until most of our Australian plant nurseries have closed down before we think about paying them a visit next time there is a spot to be filled in our garden.



Epacris reclinata
Sandstone Heath, NSW
Illustration by
Bill Gunn

AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANTS SOCIETY (Australia) Inc.

EPACRIS STUDY GROUP Special Profile Article

Some Musings on Edible Heaths

by Lenore Lindsay.

from the AUSTRALIAN FOOD PLANTS STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER, June 2011

For some years I've been toying with the idea of writing an article that I'd provisionally entitled "Edible Epacrids".

This was partly because of criticism from some quarters that there wasn't enough information on temperate and cool climate plants in the newsletter, partly because the topic hadn't been covered previously, and partly because I had very limited experience in this area myself and thought I'd learn more in the process of researching and writing.

However, things did not proceed smoothly. There seemed to be very little information around, so I made enquiries firstly within our Study group, then the Epacris and Wallum Study Groups. While I was not exactly overwhelmed with responses, I thank Phil Watson, Gwen Elliot and Barbara Henderson for their replies.

While they couldn't give me much in the way of first hand experiences, they were able to suggest a couple of references I could consult, which of course I did where possible. Perseverance produced a few more scanty references here and there, but it seems that those who write specifically about the heaths are generally not interested in whether or not the fruits are edible. In the meantime, the botanical family EPACRIDACEAE disappeared and its members were shunted back into ERICACEAE, so I wasn't sure if my working title was still appropriate.

Then in September last year in the coastal heath on Stradbroke Island I saw and tasted *Leptomeria acidula* (which is in SANTALACEAE) and got interested again, realising that maybe I needed a broader title anyway. So ... Edible Heaths.

Heath is a name given to both a habitat community, and the shrubs in the family ERICACEAE which are common in that habitat.

But, working on the first definition, of course I got tangled in all the other plants with edible parts that may be found in the heathlands, both coastal and montane. As the list of Banksias, grasstrees, lilies, ground orchids, Geebung, Didders, *Trachymene*, *Exocarpos*, *Coprosma*, *Leptomeria*, *Melastoma*, *Podocarpus* et al grew longer and longer, I decided that going along that road was going to be all too hard, so I reverted to my original idea of those plants most people think of as heaths, and stick with the ERICACEAE.

It seems that the majority of these that are edible occur in Tasmania (approximately 15 to 20 species according to Phil), and bear small roundish drupes of various shades of red, pink, white and green, and are typically mucilaginous as a strategy to assist moisture retention around the central germinating seed. Of course, many are found elsewhere in Australia too, but predominantly in cooler, wetter climates.

I have tasted the fruits of 3 or 4 heaths besides the *Leptomeria*: *Acrotriche aggregata*, a *Monotoca* and a couple of *Leucopogon*. They were generally pleasant, ranging in taste from tart through to sweet, but very tiny.

Tim Low suggests that nearly all the heaths that have fleshy fruits are probably edible, and the only exception he knows of is the Tree

Some Musings on Edible Heaths - continued

from the AUSTRALIAN FOOD PLANTS STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER, June 2011

Heath, *Trochocarpa laurina*, of eastern rainforest margins, whose blue/black or yellow fruit is bitter.

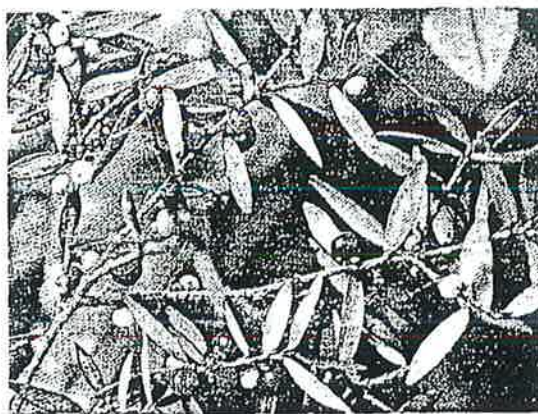
A number of the heaths were popular with early European settlers as ingredients for jams and jellies, as well as being eaten fresh. These included *Acrotriche depressa*, *Astroloma humifusum*, *Brachyloma depressum* and *Lissanthe sapida*. The fruits were often called Native Currant or Cranberry, or something similar.

The following genera are known to contain species with edible fruits: *Acrotriche*, *Astroloma*, *Brachyloma*, *Cyathodes*, *Leptecophylla*, *Leucopogon*, *Lissanthe*, *Melichrus*, *Monotoca*, *Pentachondra* and *Styphelia*.

As this is my final newsletter, following is a brief summary of what I've discovered so far about some individual edible species of heaths.

Acrotriche aggregata: Red Groundberry, Tall Groundberry.
Qld (including CQ), NSW.

Dense shrub up to 3m. Leaves simple, alternate, stiff, pointed, to 2cm. Shiny green above, whitish below. Slightly compressed cushion-shaped bright red shiny fruit to 7mm. Taste tart/sour. Tiny white flowers in spikes or axillary clusters.



Acrotriche aggregata. Photo: J.Plumb.

Acrotriche serrulata: Green fruit. Edible tiny green flowers.

Astroloma humifusum: Cranberry Heath, Native Cranberry, Tasmanian Cranberry. NSW, Vic, SA, Tas, WA.

Small, densely branched, more or less prostrate shrub usually less than 30cm high. Rigid leaves about 1cm long ending in a needle-like point. Round greenish fruits 7-11mm in diameter, often with purplish spots or stripes. Tastes of apples. Scarlet tubular flowers.

Astroloma conostephioides: Flame Heath. Vic, SA.

Prickly, twiggy shrub .3-2m tall. Narrow dark green spine-tipped leaves. Whitish fruits to 1cm completely enclosed inside reddish-brown papery scales. Sweet and sticky. Scarlet tubular flowers.

Brachyloma depressum: Spreading Brachyloma. Vic, Tas.

White flowers. Pea-sized fruits with a heavy rather musky odour when ripe. Makes a good quality rich claret coloured jam or jelly.

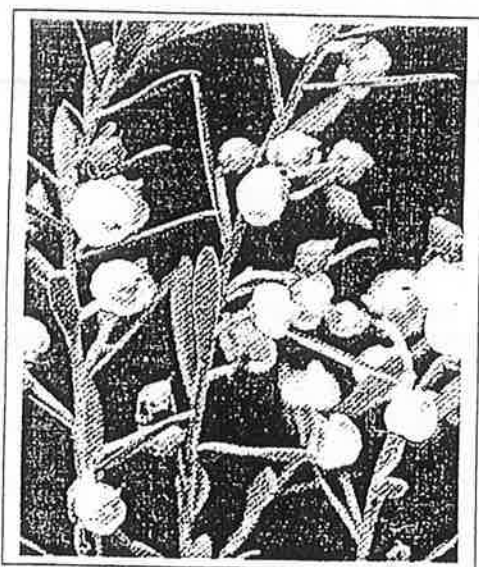
Some Musings on Edible Heaths - continued

From the AUSTRALIAN FOOD PLANTS STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER, June 2011

Leucopogon fraseri: Patotaro in N.Z.
Small prostrate shrub. Tiny spine-tipped leaves. Round orange/red fruit. Tubular white furry flowers.

Leucopogon lanceolatus: Lance Beard Heath. Qld, NSW, Vic, SA, Tas.
Shrub 1-3m tall. Tiny shiny scarlet fruits 2-3mm wide on spikes 1.5-4cm tall. Watery sweet taste. Pink buds, tiny furry white flowers.

Leucopogon leptospermioides: Beard Heath. Qld (including CQ), NSW.
Small dense shrub to about 1m. Leaves simple, alternate, to 2cm, more or less sessile with pointed apex. White, ovoid, fleshy fruits about 3.5mm long with a subtle but pleasant flavour. Small tubular white furry flowers in axillary spikes up to 2cm long.



Leucopogon leptospermioides

Photos: J.Plumb

Fruit

Flowers



Leucopogon suaveolens: Mountain Beard Heath. NSW, Vic, Tas.
Small mountain/alpine shrub. Untapered leaves 5-14mm wide with curled margins. Red fruits 4-6mm wide. Sweet tasting. Tiny white furry flowers.

Leucopogon montanus: Snow Beard Heath. NSW, Vic, Tas.
High alpine meadows. Flat leaves 3-7mm long. Sweet red fruit. White furry flowers.

Leucopogon parviflorus: Bearded Heath. All states.
Much-branched twiggy shrub with small rigid leaves. Rounded yellow-green to white fruit about 5mm long. White woolly flowers.

Lissanthe sapida: Native Cranberry. NSW.

Lissanthe strigosa: Peach Heath. Qld, NSW, Vic, SA, Tas.
Extremely prickly small shrub with slender rigid leaves ending in needle-like points. Small sweet white fruits about 4mm across. Flowers urn-shaped, white to pale pink.

Some Musings on Edible Heaths - continued

from the AUSTRALIAN FOOD PLANTS STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER, June 2011

Monotoca elliptica: Tree Broom Heath.
Orange/red fruits.

Monotoca scoparia: Prickly Broom Heath: Qld, NSW, Vic, SA, Tas.
Shrub or small tree. Dark green, rigid, convex, spiny-tipped leaves
with whitish undersides. Sweet lemon or white fruit 2-3cm wide.

Pentachondra pumila: Carpet Heath. NSW, Vic, Tas.
Tiny alpine cushion plant 5-15cm tall. Stiff leaves 3-6mm long.
Crimson fruit 5-8mm wide. Sweet and watery. Furry white flowers.

Styphelia triflora: Five Corners. Qld, NSW.
Erect twiggy shrub 1-2m tall with needle-pointed leaves. Green fruits
8-10mm long, partly concealed by scaly bracts. Sweet and tasty.
Large stone. Tubular pinkish or yellow flowers with hairy recurved
petals.

Styphelia viridis: Green Five Corners. Qld, NSW.
Erect twiggy shrub 1-2m tall with needle-pointed leaves. Sweet green
fruits. Green tubular flowers.

Styphelia adscendens: Golden Heath. NSW, Vic, SA, Tas.
More or less prostrate twiggy shrub with needle-pointed leaves. Small
green ribbed fruits. Fluffy yellow flowers.

That's about the sum of my research to date. We'd appreciate any
comments or additions you might be able to add. Please send them to
Jan for publication.

Phil recommended a reference book which I haven't been able to get
hold of yet:

Jamie Kirkpatrick et al. 1988. "City Parks and Cemeteries - Tasmanian
Remnant Grassland and Grassy Woodlands".

My Reference List:

- Cribb AB & Cribb JW: 1976. "Wild Food in Australia"
William Collins Pty Ltd, Sydney.
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Journal, Australian Native Plants Society,
Canberra Region Inc- March 2010.
- Gunn, Bill: 1996. "The Epacridaceae of the Bellarine Peninsula"
SGAP Victoria Newsletter, June 1996.
- Leiper, Glenn; Glazebrook, Jan; Cox, Denis & Rathie, Kerry: 2008.
"Mangroves to Mountains" (revised ed)
SGAP (Qld Region) Inc. Logan River Branch.
- Low, Tim: 1991. "Wild Food Plants of Australia" (revised ed)
Collins Angus & Robertson Pty Ltd, Sydney.
- Melzer, Rhonda & Plumb, Joel: 2007. "Plants of Capricornia"
Capricorn Conservation Council, Rockhampton.

Obviously I trawled through many others which yielded quite detailed
botanical information but no facts pertinent to my particular topic.
In particular I'd mention the 4 issues of "Australian Plants" of 2001
which contained the 4 part series on the Tasmanian Epacridaceae by
Crowden and Menadue. These were accompanied by some magnificent
photos of apparently fleshy fruits of a number of species, but there
was nothing to indicate edibility or otherwise.

