

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS Inc.

EPACRIS STUDY GROUP

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NEWSLETTER

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March 2006

Greetings to all Epacris Study Group members,.

Australia is currently in the grip of 'Commonwealth fever' as we host the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. There are visitors from all over the world, flags are flying and horticulture and gardening have also joined in the celebrations. There is a Floral Art Exhibition with 71 large floral arrangements featuring plants of the Commonwealth countries, and the Volunteer Guides at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne are taking special Commonwealth Connections tours, looking at the international collections within the Gardens, the diversity of flora from the Commonwealth nations and the role of these plants in shaping global history

Floral emblems are featuring prominently which brings us to *Epacris impressa*, the floral emblem of Victoria. *Epacris impressa*, Common Heath is of course a widespread species which occurs well beyond the Victorian borders, in New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania. Since late 2003 Study Group members have been recording the flowering times of various selections of *Epacris impressa*, both in the wild and in garden situations. Sincere thanks to all who have sent in results of these observations to date. This is an ongoing project and further reports will be most welcome as we seek to establish a record of variations in flowering times in different climatic regions.

An abbreviated summary of results received to date is included on page 7 of this Newsletter. On the reverse (page 8) is a copy of the original recording sheet supplied to all members. Please add your own comments to whichever page is more convenient and as we approach the main flowering period for 2006 check your garden regularly and see if we can add considerably to our data during this year.

While checking plants of *Epacris impressa*, it is always good to have a pair of secateurs in hand - as well as your notepad and pen of course ! This species certainly responds extremely well to annual or more frequent pruning, which helps to maintain good vigour and attractive plants in the garden. Pruning immediately after flowering is the recommended time or the cutting of flowering stems for use indoors is of course another very effective method of pruning.

Some members have also been recording flowering times of other species while jotting down their notes on *Epacris impressa*. This information will also be welcomed with open arms, as a reference folder is being established on flowering times of all members of the genus. On page 9 you will find a sheet which hopefully will be of assistance in regard to your notes on species other than *E. impressa*.

We trust you enjoy this Newsletter, and will be happy to receive any contributions you may like to send for the next edition, which will be in October 2006.

Warm greetings, and happy gardening,

Gwen E.

News & Notes from Members

Marion Simmons reports from **Legana, Tasmania** that their *Epacris longiflora* and *E. reclinata* are surviving quite well in currently dry conditions, and that an old plant of *E. tasmanica* is growing and flowering in part shade.

Unfortunately *Epacris impressa* seems to present more of a challenge in dry conditions.

I know that other members have also found that *E. impressa* is unable to stand extended dry periods. It could however be that some clones - from low rainfall regions - are more tolerant than the offspring of plants which have originated in higher rainfall areas or permanently moist soils. If you have experience in regard to this aspect, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Welcome to a new Study Group member

Shirley Carn currently lives in **Monbulk Vic**, having gardened for a number of years in the Silvan, Montrose and Monbulk regions. Shirley has inspired many people with her gardens of Australian plants (plus a few introduced favourites) and is also very generous in assisting new gardeners to become more familiar with our native flora. She is growing quite a range of *Epacris* species. It's great to have you as a member of the Study Group Shirley.

Frost tolerance of *Epacris*

Mention has been made in our last two Newsletters regarding the frost tolerance of various *Epacris* species, with a form included for recording this information in our March 2005 Newsletter.

Study Group member **Tony Parry** thinks that he may be able to claim the record for frost tolerance with the following response -

"I have a specimen of *Epacris petrophila* growing outside here in **Switzerland** without any sort of frost protection apart from being on a quite steeply sloping site. Last winter this plant endured a typical Swiss winter with absolute impunity - the lowest temperature that I recorded was -11.7°C (in a slightly more sheltered location) though there were a number of other nights when the temperature fell to at least -10°C and days when the temperature did not rise above zero.

The plant is from Tasmania and I do not know its exact provenance, though as it was bought from Will Fletcher's nursery and he is a member of the study group you may be able to get more information from him. It is his 'upright' form.

Anyway, do I get the prize for the lowest survival temperature?"

Some people make it tough for the rest of us don't they. I'm not sure if any other members will be able to beat Tony, with his MINUS 10 and MINUS 11 degrees - but it's over to you folks! How tough have you found *Epacris* to be in cold conditions.

Incidentally Will Fletcher's nursery is PLANTS OF TASMANIA, 65 Hall St., Ridgeway, Tas, and he has an extremely good range of Tasmanian *Epacris* for sale. Further details are on page 4.

More on the recording of flowering times

As a contribution to our current study of the flowering times of *Epacris impressa* and other species **Jeff Irons** has sent an email from **England**, with the thought that a basic fact not being considered so far is DAY LENGTH and whether flowering is initiated by day length or by temperature.

Jeff suggests that if it is day length, then growing a plant collected in one area then growing it in another with longer or shorter days will obviously affect the time of flowering. It could be that flowering is initiated by daylight duration but that the actual time and duration of flowering depends on temperature. Equally things could be the other way round.

Jeff finishes by saying "Please enlighten an ignorant Pom." which is something with which we would certainly disagree. No way could Jeff ever be described as 'ignorant'. He is a wonderful Study Group member - always thinking beyond normal horticultural practices, and challenging us to do likewise.

If anyone would like to continue with thoughts on the affect of day length on flowering times, we will be happy to share all ideas with our Newsletter readers.

Thanks Jeff for starting us off along this line.

News & Notes

Progress at the Tasmanian Bushland Garden

The January 2006 issue of EUCRYPHIA, the Newsletter of the Australian Plants Society Tasmania Inc. reported on progress at the Tasmanian Bushland Garden site near Buckland.

A large roadside sign has now been erected beside the Tasman Highway with a view to this Regional Botanic Garden for South-East Tasmania being opened to the public in late 2006.

A special bed has been dedicated to the *Epacris* species of Tasmania, including a number which are rare or endangered. So far there are 16 species growing, including the endangered *Epacris stuartii* from Southport Bluff. Other rare species include *E. exserta*, *E. acuminata*, *E. barbata*, *E. virgata*, *E. frankliniae* and *E. grandis*. This will provide an excellent opportunity for people to see the range of Tasmanian *Epacris* species in a single bed, which is particularly significant as Tasmania has the greatest number of species in the genus.

An overall plan for the site is being finalised, walking tracks are being upgraded and a toilet block will be installed prior to the opening. Monthly working bees are held and new members and helpers would be very welcome. Tasmanian members of the *Epacris* Study Group would be particularly welcome. Donations of plants, seeds and financial support would also be much appreciated.

For further information you can contact Keith Corbett, at 35 Pillinger Drive, Fern Tree Tas. 7054.

From 'Australian Horticulture' magazine - August 2005

Thanks are expressed to Rosalea Ryan, Editor of 'Australian Horticulture' magazine for permission to reprint here extracts from an article in the August 2005 issue of that publication. 'Australian Horticulture' is a monthly journal published by Agricultural Publishers Pty. Ltd., P.O. Box 254, Moonee Ponds 3039. It is available by subscription, through newsagencies or in regional libraries.

'Solution's in the bag'

Growing Victoria's floral emblem, pink heath *Epacris impressa*, could become a much simpler task thanks to work being carried out at the University of Melbourne's Burnley campus.

A 'friendly fungus' identified by researchers at Burnley is critical to the species' survival in the wild but it often missing from soil in home gardens and roadside reserves . . .

Dr. Cassandra McLean and Master's researcher Melanie Conomikes discovered the link while studying genetic strains of pink heath at the site of Melbourne's Mitcham-Frankston ('Eastlink') Freeway which is currently under construction.

"The freeway could disrupt large tracts of habitat and there is only a slim chance of regrowing the pink heath without an accompanying 'friendly fungus'," McLean says.

"However the solution is simple: a teabag-style sachet of fungus material that can be planted alongside pink heath seedlings. If the seedlings and fungus are planted together, the pink heath flourishes.

"Given the right soil type and a teabag of the friendly fungus, pink heath is quite hardy, and it's drought tolerant as well."

According to McLean, fungus teabags are sold to complement specific plants overseas but do not contain local fungi so are not suitable for use with Australian natives.

Once refined in Australia, however, the technology could be adapted to produce similar sachets tailored to other indigenous species."

Rosalea Ryan

Mentioned has previously been made in our newsletters regarding mycorrhizal associations important to *Epacris* growth, and it is good to hear more of the work being done by Dr. Cassie McLean and Melanie Conomikes in this regard.

Funds are currently being sought to continue their research, and hopefully this will eventuate.

Our *Epacris* Study Group Newsletters are sent to the Research Team and we would be happy to also pass on any suggestions regarding funding availability.

Where to purchase *Epacris*

Following a recent request for information regarding nurseries propagating and offering for sale a range of *Epacris* species an item was included in our October 2005 Newsletter, seeking information from readers on the availability of various species.

We have not received a wide response at this stage, and hope that is not an indication of general unavailability of plants throughout Australia.

The widest range of species appears to be available from Kurunga Native Nursery, 118 York Road, Mt. Evelyn Vic. Ph. 03) 9760 8100. The nursery is open 8.30am - 5pm daily, and a mail-order service is available throughout mainland Australia. Species in cultivation include the following: -

<i>Epacris barbata</i>	<i>Epacris breviflora</i>
<i>Epacris calvertiana</i> forms	<i>Epacris coriacea</i>
<i>Epacris gunnii</i> , single and double-flowered forms	
<i>Epacris impressa</i> , selections with white, pink, deep pink or red flowers	
<i>Epacris impressa</i> double-flowered forms, pink and white ('Cranbourne Bells')	
<i>Epacris impressa</i> 'Spring Pink	<i>Epacris lanuginosa</i>
<i>Epacris longiflora</i> selections, including red flowers tipped white, white flowers	salmon flowers and compact forms
<i>Epacris microphylla</i> white and pink forms	
<i>Epacris mucronulata</i>	<i>Epacris muelleri</i>
<i>Epacris myrtifolia</i>	<i>Epacris obtusifolia</i>
<i>Epacris paludosa</i>	<i>Epacris petrophila</i>
<i>Epacris pulchella</i> , also prostrate form	<i>Epacris purpurascens</i>
<i>Epacris reclinata</i>	<i>Epacris serpyllifolia</i>
<i>Epacris tasmanica</i>	<i>Epacris</i> 'Nectar Pink'

For Tasmanian species, study group member Will Fletcher has a wide range available at PLANTS OF TASMANIA NURSERY AND GARDENS, 65 Hall St., Ridgeway 7054, Ph. 6239 1583 and the nursery also provides a mail-order service.

Species grown include -

<i>Epacris acuminata</i>	<i>Epacris barbata</i>
<i>Epacris grandis</i>	<i>Epacris gunnii</i>
<i>Epacris impressa</i>	<i>Epacris lanuginosa</i>
<i>Epacris mucronulata</i>	<i>Epacris myrtifolia</i>
<i>Epacris paludosa</i>	<i>Epacris petrophila</i>
<i>Epacris serpyllifolia</i>	<i>Epacris tasmanica</i>

Nurseries growing a smaller range of species can be found in the book AUSSIE PLANT FINDER by Margaret Hibbert, published by Florilegium, Glebe NSW with the species most commonly available being *Epacris impressa* and *E. longiflora*.

If you know of other nurseries growing a range of *Epacris* species, please let us know.

A new and significant garden displaying Australian plants including *Epacris*

The Australian Garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne Vic., will be officially opened on Sunday May 28th, 2006. The Botanic Gardens at Cranbourne occupies a large site of approx. 365 hectares (1000 acres). It includes some very high quality remnant bushland, now surrounded by large areas of residential development. The bushland is being managed and retained in its natural state as a valuable flora and fauna habitat zone. Some areas within the Gardens were previously farmland or sand quarry sites, and an area of approx. 26 hectares is being developed into a special garden displaying plants from all over Australia. Stage 1, occupying 11 hectares will be opened in May by the Premier of Victoria.

Epacris is one of the many genera being planted into the new Australian garden, including the cultivar *Epacris impressa* 'Cranbourne Bells', which is a naturally occurring form with white flowers composed of numerous rows of corolla petals - commonly referred to as a 'double-flowered form'. The original roadside plant discovered in Cranbourne unfortunately no longer exists but this form will certainly be preserved at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne.

A charge will apply to visit the 'Australian Garden' while the remaining area of the Botanic Gardens will continue to be free for all to visit and enjoy.

If you are visiting Victoria or Cranbourne after May 28th, be sure to put a visit to the Australian Garden on your list of 'must see' destinations. Further information can be obtained by phoning the Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne on 03) 5990 2200.

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS Inc.
EPACRIS STUDY GROUP Plant profile

Epacris microphylla R. Br.

and

Epacris microphylla* var. *rhomboidea L. Fraser & Vickery

Common name - Coral Heath

microphylla = small leaves

Epacris microphylla is a small shrub growing to about 1 m tall or occasionally taller, with a width of 50 cm - 1 m.

It occurs in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania.

As the species name suggests, it has very small leaves. They are somewhat ovate, to about 5 mm long by 3 mm wide and taper to a fine sharp point. They are almost stalkless and are crowded and often overlapping along the stems.

The flowers, produced usually from mid-autumn to mid-spring have a short floral tube to about 2 mm long, with spreading lobes to about 4 mm across. They are usually white, but the buds are often pink and the flowers can also be tinged with pink. Although the flowers are quite small they can be profuse, providing a showy display when plants are in full bloom.

The fruit is a small capsule of about 2 mm long.



Illustration © Bill Gunn

Epacris microphylla, pink-bud selection
 Photograph © Rodger Elliot



Epacris microphylla

var. ***rhombifolia*** L. Fraser & Vickery

This variety is similar in most respects to the above but the leaves taper towards the base and are rhomboid in outline.

This variety primarily occurs in New South Wales with a small number of disjunct populations in Victoria. It is found often at altitudes above 1400 m with the original type specimen having been collected at Barrington Tops NSW.

***Epacris microphylla* R. Br.**

Cultivation

Epacris microphylla occurs from coastal heathlands to alpine and subalpine regions, often in moist or seasonally wet peaty soils.

Plants are adaptable to a wide range of conditions and this Coral Heath is popular in cultivation. Several *Epacris* Study Group members have indicated that they are growing plants of this species.

Moist but well-drained soils are preferred in a situation with some shade or sun for only part of the day. Plants are tolerant of frost and snow.

Epacris microphylla is excellent for container cultivation. Light to medium pruning of plants immediately after flowering will encourage continued vigour and good bushy growth to support a showy display of flowers in the following season.

Propagation

Epacris microphylla is commonly propagated from cuttings of barely firm young growth. This method should be used if particular forms, including those with pinkish flowers are desired.

Seed can also be used if available.

Note: *Epacris gunnii* is very closely related to *Epacris microphylla* and some botanists consider it should be included in *E. microphylla*.

***Epacris microphylla* R. Br.** was described and named by Robert Brown, who also named the family of Epacridaceae and several other species of *Epacris*.

Robert Brown, D.C.L. (Hon.) LL.D (Hon.), F.L.S, F.R.S. (1773 - 1858)

Robert Brown was born in Montrose, Scotland. He is regarded as the leading British botanist to collect in Australia during the early 19th century.

He was one of the scientists who accompanied Matthew Flinders on The Investigator to chart the coast of Australia. They arrived in Western Australia in 1801. Flinders left for the return journey to England in 1803 but Brown stayed in Australia with Ferdinand Bauer. They travelled to eastern Australia including Tasmania. Brown collected over 4000 plant specimens before returning to England in 1805.

Robert Brown succeeded Dryander as Banks' librarian and after Banks' death in 1820 he inherited his herbarium and library. In 1827 he became the first Keeper of the Botanical Department of the British Museum.



Robert Brown

Epacris microphylla* var. *rhombifolia. L. Fraser & Vickery was described and named in 1937 by Dr. Lilian Ross Fraser and Dr. Joyce W. Vickery.

Dr. Lilian Ross Fraser, born in 1913, was an ecologist and mycologist, colleague and friend of Dr. Joyce Vickery in Sydney, NSW.

Dr. Joyce W. Vickery, was born in Sydney in 1908 and died 1979. She joined the staff of the National Herbarium of NSW in 1936, in the period between the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War. Conservation of natural plant communities received little support during this time and Joyce Vickery lent her efforts to this cause, especially in areas such as Mt. Kosciusko. Her research was primarily in the Poaceae family of grasses.



Joyce W. Vickery

Information & photographs from Australian National Botanic Gardens Biography Department of the Environment & Heritage.

Space for additional notes on *Epacris microphylla*

**Epacris impressa selections -
and their flowering times**

This page is provided to assist in the recording of flowering times of the various selections of *Epacris impressa* currently being grown.

It is suggested that a solid line be used to indicate good flowering, and a dotted line when plants are coming into flower, finishing flowering, or just producing odd blooms.



Illustration © Bill Gunn

<i>E. impressa</i> Selection	Flower colour	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Any extra comments												
<i>E. impressa</i> Selection	Flower colour	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Any extra comments												
<i>E. impressa</i> Selection	Flower colour	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Any extra comments												
<i>E. impressa</i> Selection	Flower colour	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Any extra comments												
<i>E. impressa</i> Selection	Flower colour	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Any extra comments												
<i>E. impressa</i> Selection	Flower colour	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Any extra comments												
<i>E. impressa</i> Selection	Flower colour	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Any extra comments												

**Flowering times of
Epacris species in cultivation**

This page is provided to assist in the recording of flowering times of *Epacris* species being grown by Epacris Study Group members.

It is suggested that a solid line be used to indicate good flowering, and a dotted line when plants are coming into flower, finishing flowering, or just producing odd blooms.

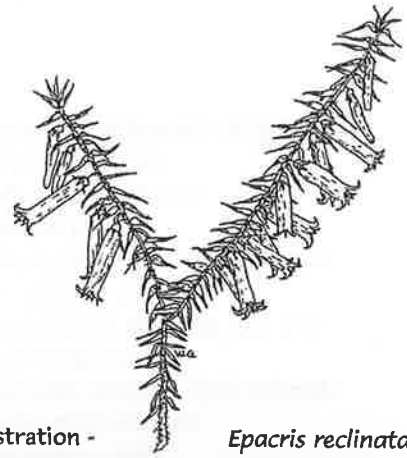


Illustration -

Epacris reclinata
© Bill Gunn

<i>Epacris</i>	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
.....

Any extra comments

<i>Epacris</i>	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
.....

Any extra comments

<i>Epacris</i>	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
.....

Any extra comments

<i>Epacris</i>	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
.....

Any extra comments

<i>Epacris</i>	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
.....

Any extra comments

<i>Epacris</i>	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
.....

Any extra comments

<i>Epacris</i>	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
.....

Any extra comments

<i>Epacris</i>	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
.....

Any extra comments

<i>Epacris</i>	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
.....

Any extra comments

Epacris Study Group - Membership information.

Membership of The Epacris Study Group and other Study Groups of the Australian Plant Society / Society for Growing Australian Plants is available to all members of the A.P.S. / S.G.A.P.

Membership of any Australian state group, not necessarily that of the area in which you reside, entitles you to membership of one or more study groups.

You can join the EPACRIS STUDY GROUP for just \$5.00 for 1 year or \$10 for 2 years renewable in June. Overseas subscriptions - \$10 Aust. p.a.

Membership renewal date is shown on address label of current Study Group members.

Memberships should be sent to P.O. Box 655, Heathmont 3135.

Please make cheques payable to The Epacris Study Group.

Sender:

EPACRIS STUDY GROUP

P.O. Box 655, Heathmont Vic. 3135