

Seaberry Saltbush and other Revegetators ... John Slykhuís

Although normally growing closer to the sea, three indigenous plants have been observed making a gradual impact in the Bellbrae and Jan Juc areas east of the Great Ocean Road. Whether due to the result of revegetation efforts, climate change, or spread by the agents of wind, animals or water, a noticeable difference is occurring to the understorey of the local ironbark and messmate dry sclerophyll forests.

The 'invaders' have been colonising lightly timbered areas formerly used for grazing, or areas which have reduced numbers of drought-affected understorey plants such as Varnish and Golden Wattles.

Seaberry Saltbush *Rhagodia candolleana* subsp. *candolleana*

A dense, sprawling and scrambling shrub up to 4 metres high that is commonly found growing along large stretches of our coastline in sand dunes as well as on coastal cliff tops. It has an ability to withstand regular salt-laden winds from the ocean as well as growing in low soil moisture and shade conditions.

The genus name comes from *rhagodes* or berry-like, which describes the succulent fruit.

The species name has been named after a Swiss botanist, A. De Candolle.

The foliage is semi-succulent, ranging from thin to thick depending on available soil moisture. Leaves are opposite or alternate, deep green above and paler beneath; oblong to ovate in shape. Leaf margins are gently recurved and the leaves vary from thin-textured to fleshy. Flowers are inconspicuous, from September to December, but followed by striking pyramidal sprays of shiny red berries that peak in the autumn. Silver-eyes and other birds often feed on the berries. The Wadawurrung people used the bitter edible berry to make a pink dye, presumably for decorative purposes.

Seaberry Saltbush is often seen growing locally as small plants at the base of Red Ironbarks or under the forest canopy generally. Thickets form over a number of years, providing shelter for rabbits and foxes as well as native fauna.



Seaberry Saltbush

Bower Spinach *Tetragonia implexicoma*

Bower Spinach is a trailing, scrambling or climbing perennial. *Tetragonia* belongs in the *Aizoaceae* family of scrambling herbs or shrubs with fleshy leaves and fruit. The genus name comes from the Greek, '*tetra*', meaning four, and '*gonia*', angle, after the four-angled fruit. *Implexicoma* comes from '*implexa*', tangled and '*comans*', leafy.

It often carpets the sands of primary and secondary dunes but also grows well under large shrubs and trees. The bright green leaves are thick and succulent, angular-ovate diamond shaped, 2-6 cm long and 8-40 mm wide. The leaves are useful as a 'living mulch' and as a carpeting ground cover when planted in garden beds. The flowers are yellow and strongly scented, growing on short stalks from the leaf axils. This feature can help to differentiate this species from the similar New Zealand Spinach, *Tetragonia tetragonioides*, where the flowers are stemless or sessile. Flowering for most of the year but peaking from late winter to late summer, orange-red berries then develop and blacken as they ripen.

Bower Spinach as its name suggests, provides habitat hollows for wildlife in the often windy, sunny and dry but salty coastal environment. It can be maintained as a ground cover by pruning climbing stems. The Wadawurrung people cooked and ate the young shoots and leaves. Cooking reduces the bitterness of fresh leaves, removing the oxalic acid, making them more palatable.



Bower Spinach

Sea Box *Alyxia buxifolia*

Sea Box is a slow growing, spreading coastal shrub with shining, stiff, dark green, broadly oval leaves. They are lighter beneath and up to 25 mm long. The stems exude a milky sap when damaged. Usually found on exposed cliffs, it belongs to the *Apocynaceae* family which include the Mediterranean Oleander, *Nerium oleander*.

The flowers are small, with four white petals spreading obliquely from a narrow tube, several together in terminal clusters, and fragrant. It flowers from spring to summer, with the fruit a berry-like drupe, globular, about 6 mm across, and orange to red in colour. Propagation is by seed or cuttings, which are slow to strike.

Sea Box is a front-line coastal plant which tolerates salt spray. It is not unusual to find smaller plants with an open habit growing under established trees such as Messmate and Red Ironbark.



Sea Box

References

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