



(a) photo: M. Fagg

## *Eremophila debilis*



*Eremophila debilis* (formerly *Myoporum debile*) is a low, trailing sub-shrub with weak, fleshy stems, spreading to around 1.5 to 2 m in diameter. Some forms may be partially upright in habit to about half a metre [7]. Common names are Winter apple [7] and Amulla [4].

The name *Eremophila* comes from Greek, *eremos* meaning desert and *phileo* to love, i.e. “desert loving”, referring to the habitat of many of the species. *Debilis* means weak, a reference to trailing, growth habit [7].

### Natural Populations

*Eremophila debilis* is found in Qld and NSW [9]. It is common in dry, woodland areas on a variety of soils in box and cypress communities [6, 7, 9].

Population map:

[www.ala.org.au/explore/species-maps/](http://www.ala.org.au/explore/species-maps/)

### Flowering and Seeds

The small flowers are found in the leaf axils and are usually pale mauve, but white and blue forms are also found. The main flowering period is summer but spasmodic flowering may occur at other times [7, 8].

The fleshy fruits are perhaps the most attractive feature of the plant. They are about 1 cm in diameter, green in colour with pink or reddish tones [7]. The fruit develops in February – March [6] and contains about 4 seeds that are not released until the fruit rots [8].

Fruits are collected by hand from the plant or from the ground under plants if present (make sure they are fresh). Clean drupe to the woody, hard stone before sowing [2].

## Cultivation and Uses

The hard woody fruit prevents germination and contains a chemical inhibitor, so it makes it very difficult to grow from seed [3]. A number of treatment methods have been tried including sowing the ripe fruits, sowing of aged and washed fruits and splitting the fruits to extract the seeds prior to sowing. The latter involves splitting the fruits in halves and quarters but some seeds are inevitably damaged during the process [7].

Propagation of *E. debilis* from cuttings is easy using hardened, current season's growth. There may be potential for the use of *E. debilis* as a root stock for some of the more difficult to grow *Eremophilas* [7]. Best results have been achieved by taking cuttings in summer. These require three or four weeks to strike [6].

*E. debilis* is not a common species and appears to be restricted to small colonies of plants in widely scattered sites. It may have been more abundant in the past, as it is not unpalatable to stock and is grazed heavily at times, despite its low growth-habit [4].

*E. debilis* has been in cultivation for many years and is a reliable groundcover for many areas. It is suited to a range of soils provided drainage is reasonable, and is best located in a sunny position. Severe frosts may damage the plant but it will often recover quickly once the weather warms up [7].

Adult plants resprout from rootstock after fire [8] and abundant seedling recruitment can be found in burnt and unburnt areas after rain [8].

In cultivation, the density of its foliage produces an attractive ground cover. The numerous stems have upturned tips and occasionally, ascending stems provide some height [6]. Once established, *E. debilis* is a desirable ground cover

plant worthy of cultivation for its flowers, fruits and foliage [6]. It lives for 10 - 20 years [8]. Alternatively, a single healthy specimen will cover an area of a square metre in two or three years [6].

These plants bear edible fruit, seed, leaves or roots. Some require treatment before use [10].

*E. debilis* is ideal for balconies, verandas or decks and also suitable for large or small garden rockeries [10].

To source seeds or plants:  
[www.grassywoodlands.org.au](http://www.grassywoodlands.org.au)



(a) photo: M. Fagg



---

## References

---

(a) Pictures under License from the Australian National Botanic Gardens.

[1] Carr, D. (1997). *Plants in Your Pants: a pocket guide for the identification and use of the common plants of the northwest slopes*. Greening Australia NSW, Armidale.

[2] Ralph, M. (1993). *Seed Collection of Australian Native Plants For Revegetation, Tree Planting and Direct Seeding*. 2nd ed. Fitzroy, Victoria: Bushland Horticulture.

[3] Ralph, M. (1997). *Growing Australian Native Plants from Seed For Revegetation, Tree Planting and Direct Seeding*. Fitzroy, Victoria: Murray Ralph/Bushland Horticulture.

[4] Cunningham, G.M., Mulham, W.E., Milthorpe, P.L. and Leigh, J.H. (1981). *Plants of Western New South Wales*. D. West: NSW Government Printing Office.

[5] Langkamp P. (ed.) (1987). *Germination of Australian Native Plant Seed*. Melbourne: Inkata Press.

---

## Internet links

---

[6] Australian National Botanic Gardens website: <http://www.anbg.gov.au/gnp/gnp10/eremophila-debilis.html>

[7] Australian Society for Growing Australian Plants Fact Sheet: <http://asgap.org.au/e-deb.html>

[8] The Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust: [http://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/science/Evolutionary\\_Ecology\\_Research/Ecology\\_of\\_Cumberland\\_Plain\\_Woodland/woodland\\_plants/eremophila\\_debilis](http://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/science/Evolutionary_Ecology_Research/Ecology_of_Cumberland_Plain_Woodland/woodland_plants/eremophila_debilis)

[9] PlantNET National Herbarium of New South Wales: <http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/NSWfl.pl?page=nswfl&lvl=s&name=Eremophila~debilis>

[10] Greening Australia Nursery, Queensland: [http://www.qld.greeningaustralia.org.au/gaqotsasp/07\\_plant\\_search/species.asp?varPlantType=0&varLabelAspect=0&varLabelSoil=0&varHabitat=0&varSpecialFeatures=0&varStockStatus=all&page=11](http://www.qld.greeningaustralia.org.au/gaqotsasp/07_plant_search/species.asp?varPlantType=0&varLabelAspect=0&varLabelSoil=0&varHabitat=0&varSpecialFeatures=0&varStockStatus=all&page=11)