



Wahlenbergia gracilis



Wahlenbergia gracilis is an erect to sprawling perennial herb, with many branches from a few basal stems. Plants often die back in summer to a thick taproot [7]. Common names include Australian Bluebell [6] and Sprawling Bluebell [7].

Distinction between the different *Wahlenbergia* species can be difficult at times [1].

Population map:
www.ala.org.au/explore/species-maps/

Natural Populations

Wahlenbergia gracilis is found in Qld, NSW, Vic, Tas, SA, and NT [5]. It is a widespread and common plant growing in a variety of soils from moist, well drained soils to poor, stony soils in dry conditions [1]. It is found in wet to dry forests, woodlands, shrublands and grasslands, including on roadsides and in gardens and lawns [5, 9, 7, 12].

W. gracilis usually grows during the cooler months although germination and growth occasionally occurs after favourable rains during the warmer seasons. It becomes very conspicuous when in flower and, together with other Bluebells, may colour the landscape during spring.

Flowering and Seeds

W. gracilis has tiny soft bell-shaped flowers at the end of stems [7]. Flowering occurs mainly in late winter to spring but some flowers can be found throughout the year [1]. Flowers open in mid-morning in full sunshine and close late afternoon [10].

The fruits are papery capsules that change from green to tan brown, and become brittle when seed is ripe. Most capsules contain many fine seeds, although, not all seed will be fertile [3].

Seed collection is most common through summer [1]. The seed matures 3-4 weeks after flowering. Cut the stalks with capsules and

place upside down in paper bags. Allow to dry in a warm spot. Lightly beat or crush capsules to release the fine red-brown seed. Sieve to clean. Seed from some areas may have a 4-6 months after-ripening period [3].



photo: K. Beattie - www.flicker.com

Cultivation and Uses

The seed has a short dormancy period [1]. Stratification at 3-5° C for 3 months [1, 4], as well as using 12 months old seed [1] may improve results. Cover the fine seed lightly as darkness significantly decreases results. Germination usually occurs within 3-4 weeks [4].

Propagation is also possible from cuttings [1, 4].

Plants are tolerant of drought, exposure and light frost [8], but are phosphorous intolerant [9]. They are fast growing [8] in full sun or semi-shade [7]. It is a useful groundcover

plant [10] but longevity is less than 3 years [6]. Mature plants resprout after fire [6].

It is eaten by stock and is regarded as good forage, although it lacks bulk and is seldom a major component of the pasture [2].

The flowers can be eaten raw [10], and the nectar is food for butterflies [7].

To source seeds or plants:

www.grassywoodlands.org.au

References

- [1] Walker, K., Burrows, G. and McMahon, L. (2001). *Bidgee Bush, An identification guide to common native plants species of the South Western Slopes of New South Wales*. Greening Australia, South West Slopes.
- [2] 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.
- [3] Ralph, M. (1993). *Seed Collection of Australian Native Plants For Revegetation, Tree Planting and Direct Seeding*. 2nd ed. Fitzroy, Victoria: Bushland Horticulture.
- [4] Ralph, M. (1997). *Growing Australian Native Plants from Seed For Revegetation, Tree Planting and Direct Seeding*. Fitzroy, Victoria: Murray Ralph/Bushland Horticulture.

Internet links

- [5] PlantNET National Herbarium of New South Wales: <http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/NSWfl.pl?page=nswfl&lvl=s&p&name=Wahlenbergia~gracilis>
- [6] The Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust: http://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/science/Evolutionary_Ecology_Research/Ecology_of_Cumberland_Plain_Woodland/woodland_plants/wahlenbergia_gracilis
- [7] Yarra Ranges Local Plant Directory: http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Residents/Yarra_Ranges_Plant_Directory/Yarra_Ranges_Local_Plant_Directory/Lower_Storey/Herbs_and_Groundcovers_1m/Wahlenbergia_gracilis
- [8] Plant This website: <http://plantthis.com.au/plant-information.asp?gardener=24452>
- [9] Tasmanian understorey network: <http://www.understorey-network.org.au/communities.html?species=Wahlenbergia%20gracilis>
- [10] Greening Australia Queensland Nursery: http://www.qld.greeningaustralia.org.au/gaqotsasp/07_plant_search/features.asp?SpeciesName=Wahlenbergia%20gracilis
- [11] Victorian Flora: <http://www.victorianflora.wmcn.org.au/plantDetail.php?plantno=379.00000>
- [12] Australian National Botanic Gardens & Australian National Herbarium, Harden Species List: <http://www.anbg.gov.au/greening-grainbelt/harden-species-list.xls>