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FITZGERALD EREMOPHILA

Eremophila denticulata F. Muell. (MYOPORACEAE)



(photo: S. D. Hopper)

This is one of a small group of eremophilas that are sometimes known as "native fuchsias" because of their decorative elongated flowers with protruding stamens. The Fitzgerald Eremophila is a particularly beautiful shrub with shiny orange-yellow buds, carmine flowers and beaked fruits. Many eremophilas, the "Poverty bushes", are desert plants but the Fitzgerald Eremophila grows along river banks in a moderately high rainfall zone.

Although it is fairly common in cultivation, the species is very rare in the wild and is only known from a small area within the Fitzgerald River National Park. It was described in 1859, by Ferdinand Von Mueller, one of the earliest and greatest Australian botanists. Its specific name *denticulata* is of Latin derivation and means "small tooth", referring to the indentations along the edges of the leaves.

DESCRIPTION

A shrub about 1.5 m tall with very erect, often unbranched stems. Leaves sticky, up to 5 cm long (including stalk) and 1 cm wide, tapering towards the stem, with shortly toothed margins. Flower buds shiny, orange-yellow. Flowers carmine, about 3 cm long, borne on long S shaped stalks. There are four petal lobes in the upper lip of the flower and the fifth petal lobe is cut much deeper forming the lower lip. Fruits about 1 cm long and 1 cm wide, prominently beaked.

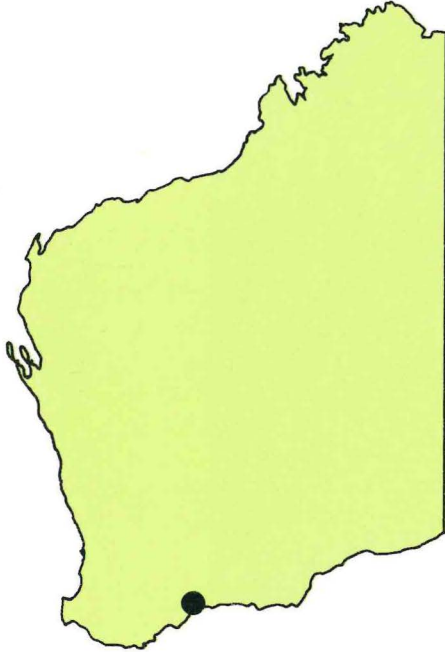
Its closest relative is the Slender Fuchsia, (*Eremophila decipiens*), which differs in having smooth rather than toothed leaf margins.



(photo: S. D. Hopper)

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

The Fitzgerald Eremophila has a known geographical range of only about 13 km. It grows along river banks in the East Mount Barren region, where the annual rainfall is about 600 mm. At one locality the eremophila was recorded growing in a low open woodland of the Swamp Yate (*Eucalyptus occidentalis*) with an open understorey of wattles. There were also several shrub species and below these an open layer of tall sedges. The soil was coarse sandy skeletal clay loam amongst granite rocks.



REPRODUCTIVE BIOLOGY

The flowers mature in October-January and probably are pollinated by birds. The fruits usually contain one or two seeds.

The plants probably resprout after fires but their fire response needs to be investigated.

In cultivation the species is fast growing. It requires little watering and is able to grow in both light and heavy soils.



A Fitzgerald Eremophila shrub bearing green berry-like fruits below its colourful flowers. (photo: S. D. Hopper)

CONSERVATION

The species was originally grown from seed but is now more frequently grown from cuttings. It has been in cultivation in the Adelaide area for many years. In Western Australia it is sold by one nursery but is not available from seed dealers.

In the wild, *Eremophila denticulata* appears to be extremely rare. Only two widely separated plants were sighted in 1980 when a search for the species was conducted along one of the rivers where it had previously been collected. The only other river from which the eremophila has been recorded is in a less accessible area which may harbour a much larger number of plants. Both locations are in the Fitzgerald River National Park.

IUCN Red Data Book Category : RARE

Australian Plants at Risk Code : 2VC

FURTHER READING

Rye, B. L. and Hopper S. D. (1981). A guide to the gazetted rare flora of Western Australia. Dept. Fish. Wild. West. Aust. Rept. No. 42.

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