

## WESTERN AUSTRALIAN WILDFLOWERS.

## No. 2: The Blue Leschenaultia.

C. A. GARDNER,  
Government Botanist.

If you were to ask me which flower I thought the most beautiful of the immense collection to be found in South-Western Australia, I should unhesitatingly name the Blue Leschenaultia, the gem of the woodland in spring, whose ethereal blue mocks the heavens, and paints the hillsides and gravelly places with a delicate hue, probably unsurpassed by any other flower on earth, unless we compare it with the golden daffodil of the English woods in spring. The violet, the primrose and rose have been painted for us by poets, and these plants together with our scented boronia and wattle, have become dear to us through sentiment and associations, but compared with the blue leschenaultia, how inferior they appear.

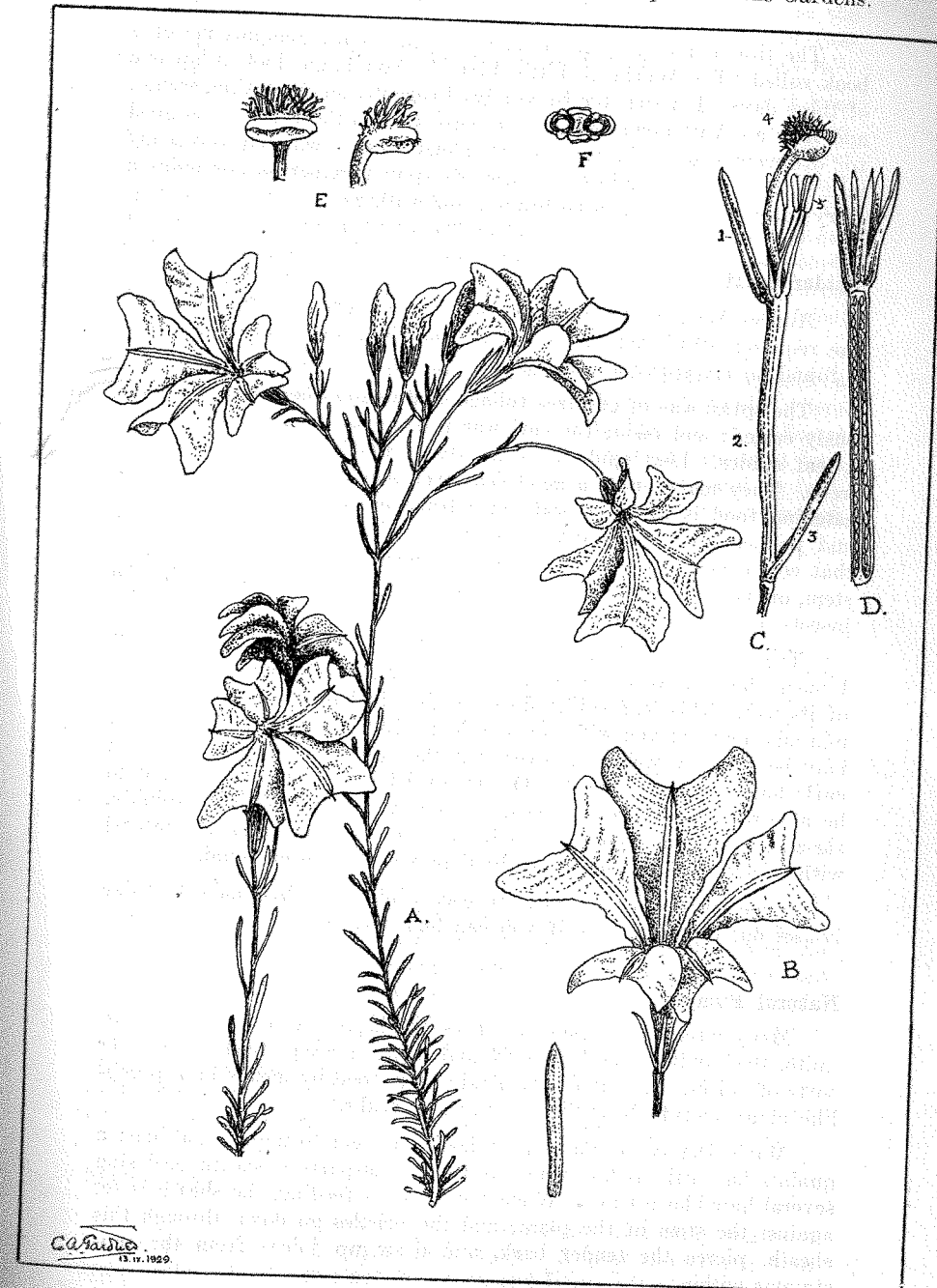
This most beautiful though scentless flower was named by the English botanist, Lindley, who called it *Leschenaultia biloba*, in honour of the French naturalist Leschenault, a member of the Baudin and Péron expedition that visited our shores in 1801.

Is there no popular, no familiar pet-name for this gem of the hillsides? We speak of the Christmas Tree, the Everlasting, and the Buttercup, leaving their botanical names for use among scientists. We do not call the Kangaroo Paw the *Anigozanthus*. What shall we call the Leschenaultia?

There are seventeen species of this flower in Western Australia, and only a few of them are blue. The commoner colours are red, orange, or yellow. Conspicuous among them, apart from the one here described, are the tufted yellow species of the Mullewa district, the yellow and red species of the Geraldton and Midland districts, and the lowly red species which carpets the clay soils of the Great Southern areas early in spring with a hue of the most intense crimson. The genus *Leschenaultia* belongs to the family *Goodeniaceae*, one which is almost exclusively Australian. The members of this family can at once be distinguished from any similar plants by the curious structure to be found at the top of the style. This is a cup-shaped or two-lipped, often fringed organ, known as the *indusium*; it encloses the stigma and collects pollen. It is illustrated for you in figures D and E of the accompanying plate. In leschenaultia the ovary or seed-box is joined to the stalk-like calyx-tube, and contains numerous short seeds, which resemble small pieces of twigs broken across. The five corolla-lobes have wide wings, and the two uppermost lobes are shorter than the others. The anthers at first are joined together in a circle, but later on they separate. Some species of leschenaultia do not possess such pronounced wings to the corolla, and in one species they are altogether absent, so that the flower scarcely resembles our idea of a leschenaultia.

The beautiful blue leschenaultia is most prolific in the gravelly soils of the Darling Range, but may be found as far east as Southern Cross. The colour varies from a rich blue through the cerulean blue to a very pale blue or white, but the usual colour is the true sky blue. The plant takes many years to recover from fire, and is easily damaged by stock. This plant is not so common around the easily accessible hill spots near Perth as in former years; it is gradually being

destroyed by fire, stock, and picnic parties. It is possible to grow it from cuttings, and you should try to cultivate some for yourselves, remembering that it likes ironstone soils. The plants are not easily raised from seeds, and the few that have been cultivated under glass in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London, are the pride of the Gardens.



The Blue Leschenaultia (*Leschenaultia biloba*).