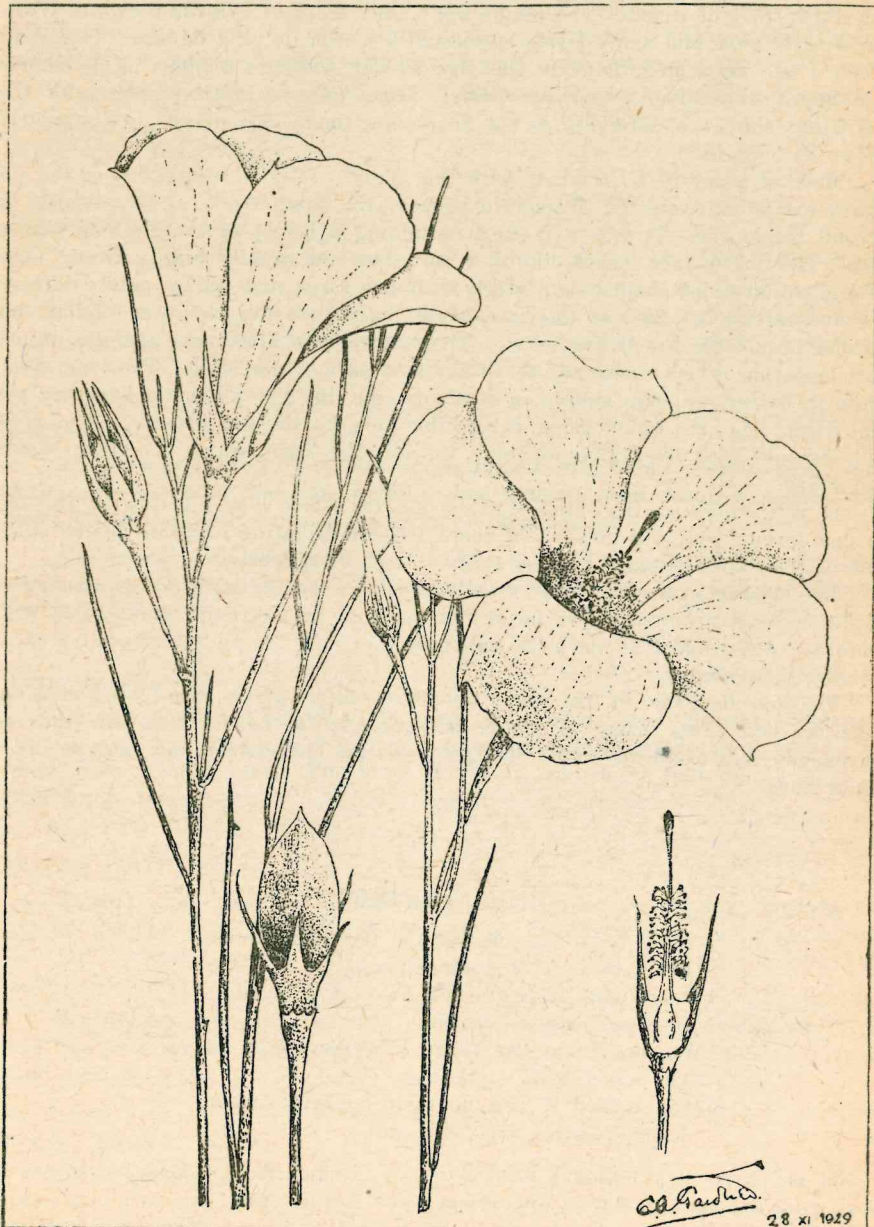


## WESTERN AUSTRALIAN WILDFLOWERS.

## THE CRIMSON-CENTRED HIBISCUS.

(By C. A. GARDNER, Government Botanist.)

Proudly erect, with delicate violet flowers, the centres of which are deeply crimson-stained, this wild hibiscus loves the sun. Its rigid twiggy stems carry no wealth of foliage, but what the plant lacks in this direction is more than made up



Wild Red-centred Hibiscus (*Cienfugosia hakeaefolia*), Newdegate, W.A.

by its glorious blooms, whose delicate textures defy the heat of summer. The sun-baked soil, so fatal to most wild flowers, holds no terrors for this plant. Indeed, the hibiscus appears to revel in the summer heat, its proud bearing and royal hues proclaiming it a prince of the bushland. Bursting into bloom during October, it continues to flower until the end of March, thus carrying part of the glory of spring throughout the whole of our summer season.

The order of plants to which the hibiscus belongs, the *Cienfugosia*, was named after a Spanish botanist, Bernardo Cienfuegos, who in the seventeenth century, published a history of plants. The plants are mainly tropical. In the north of Western Australia we find many lovely species with scarlet or pink flowers. The plant which I am describing, however, belongs to our southern regions, and extends into South Australia. *Cienfugosia* differs from *hibiscus* in the structure of the pistil, but since the difference is not an obvious one, both plants are popularly known as hibiscus.

Most of you will be familiar with this plant. It is widespread over the interior, extending from the Murchison to near the south coast, and eastwards to beyond Kalgoorlie. It is a stiff shrub, attaining a height of from six to twelve feet. The leaves are needle-like but soft, and are usually bright green. The flowers are trumpet-shaped, and erect, with five large and showy petals. There are five calyx-lobes, and at the base of the calyx are five to seven similar but smaller organs known as bracteoles. The stamens are numerous, and are united in a long tube which surrounds the ovary and part of the style. The long style, white in colour, appears simple in structure, but the five stigmatic branches are united into one, the union being perceptible only by the five grooves. The fruit is a capsule with five valves opening to emit the seeds which are light brown and hairy.

If you observe a true hibiscus, such as the native lilac hibiscus, or the red garden species, you will notice that there are five radiating branches to the style. This is the only difference between *hibiscus* and *Cienfugosia*.

The crimson-centred hibiscus usually grows in soil containing a great amount of decomposed granite, and is never far removed from granite rock. You will, therefore, often find it in the light soils near the edges of sandplain country or in scrubby jam country.

The specific name of the plant we are dealing with is *hakeafolia*, meaning hakea-leaved. This name is rather unfortunate, for hakeas have all kinds of leaves, and they are always very rigid, whereas the hibiscus has soft, almost juicy, green leaves.