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Nylandtia scoparia | Plantz Africa

Introduction

Identifying the species in the genus *Nylandtia* using herbarium material only, can be misleading, as the habit and growth form of *N . spinosa* and *N . scoparia* are quite distinct and not easily discerned from herbarium specimens. A recent trip to the West Coast from Darling up to the West Coast National Park helped to confirm the characteristics of these species. Both are very decorative during flowering and fruiting stages and *N . scoparia* is especially showy, creating a conspicuous pink to mauve display in the field.



Description

Description

The growth form of *N . scoparia* varies from small trees to erect shrubs of up to 2.5 m. The branches are finely divided, erect and spreading. They are green and furrowed, usually ending in short spines that are almost leafless. The leaves are alternately arranged, almost sessile (leaf stalk is very short and clutching) and oblong to lanceolate. The apex of the leaf is hooked and often extends in a short spine (mucronate).



Flowers are arranged in many-flowered racemes and are pink to mauve. Typical of the family Polygalaceae, the anterior petal is keel-like, with a lobed multifid crest. Flowering time extends from July to September. The fruit is a fleshy drupe, white to green, gradually turning red and clutched by persistent mauve calyx lobes. There are 1 or 2 seeds.

Conservation Status

Status

N . scoparia has not been assessed in the *Southern African plant Red Data Lists* (Golding 2002). However, this plant occurs in the Sand Plain Fynbos and the West Coast Renosterveld (Rebelo 1998), which is currently heavily impacted by alien invasive species and is slowly being encroached by urbanization and effects of expansion of the Cape Metropolitan Area.

Distribution and habitat

Distribution description

The species occurs from Van Rhynsdorp in the Western Cape to Karbonkelberg in Simonstown. It is most common in the Clanwilliam and Hopefield areas, with the most easterly distribution at Bain's Kloof (Johnson & Weitz 1991). These plants are adapted to sandy soils and often occur on rocky slopes. As this species is very ornamental, it would be suited to cultivation under fynbos conditions.

Derivation of name and historical aspects

History

The plant was first described as *Polygala spinosa* by Linnaeus in 1751 and 1753. The Belgian botanist, Barthelemy Dumortier (1822) recognized that this species belongs to a genus different from *Polygala* and named it *Nylandtia* in honour of Pierre Nylandt, a Dutch botanist (Johnson & Weitz 1991). Although the last-mentioned authors described only *N . spinosa* and *N . spinosa* var. *scoparia,* Goldblatt & Manning (2000) found sufficient evidence to create the new species *N . scoparia*. This species belongs to the family Polygalaceae that is cosmopolitan in warm and temperate countries. In southern Africa the family comprises five genera, namely *Heterosamara* , *Muraltia* , *Nylandtia* , *Polygala* and *Securidaca*.

Ecology

Ecology

According to Johnson & Weitz (1991), small quantities of nectar are produced in the early stages of flowering. After pollination the exposed ovary matures into a fleshy fruit clasped by the persistent, deep purple wings of the calyx. The fruits are eaten by birds and small animals and dispersal of the seeds are probably through the digestive tract of these animals. Up to seven phenological stages (changes in the corolla shades from purple to white) can be recognized from the bud to the stage of seed development in fertilized flowers.

Uses

Use

As the species is remarkably ornamental in both the flowering as well as the fruiting stages, it would be an asset in horticulture. The plants flower abundantly and probably produce enough nectar to be advantageous to the honey industry. The edible fruits are important for sustainable use by birds and small animals.



Growing Nylandtia scoparia

Grow

The best use of the plant in the garden would be in open sandy spaces where the plants can be exposed to wind and where an aspect of mauve flowers is needed. Companion plants could be *Olea europaea* subsp. *africana*, *Euclea racemosa*, *Polygala myrtifolia*, *Felicia filifolia* and various *Protea* and *Erica* species.

The plants are propagated by seeds in sandy soil.

References

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Credits

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