Enchylaena tomentosa – Ruby Saltbush

Enchylaena tomentosa is found over a wide range of poor soils from coastal, partially stabilised, dune sands near the Southern Ocean in South Australia, where it may be planted by salt and sand-bearing winds, to riverine clay loams, often in saline depressions, and to the deep siliceous, sandy soils in many semi-arid regions of the continent. The species is recorded in salt marsh habitats in tropical, sub-tropical, and temperate regions. The leaf type of E. tomentosa is typical of many chenopods with reduced size and succulence are adaptations to nutritionally poor soils and the leaf tomentum reflects considerable heat which may otherwise be damaging to cell tissue.

In cultivation with favourable soil conditions, a less sparse and possibly more vigorous plant may result, well able to cope with any periods of relative dryness or with cold conditions including frosts. E. tomentosa has been shown to tolerate temperatures of -6°C in cultivation at the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra.

Propagation

The species is propagated successfully from seed or cuttings. Seed should be cleaned by removing the succulent tissue of the fruit prior to sowing and germination should occur in one to four weeks. A well-drained medium, kept moist without excessive overhead watering, is desirable for cuttings.

WHEN TO SOW – In warm areas or in a glasshouse at any time. In frost prone areas sow when danger of frost has passed.

WHERE TO SOW – In full sun in any soil garden or pot.

SOWING – sow in moist sandy soil or seed raising mix - these seeds require no pretreatment. Sow seeds on top and compress lightly then cover. Keep moist. Cover with clear polythene until germination in 2-5 weeks.

Transplant to individual containers when large enough to handle, keep well watered and pot on or plant out at 7.5cm in height. Water in well and water regularly until established and then when required in dry weather. Only use a light application of low phosphate organic fertiliser.