



Westringia fruticosa

As a large permanent feature in a garden or public grounds where space is available, the Coastal or Native Rosemary (*Westringia fruticosa*) is an excellent choice. It is an easily grown shrub of simple and neat appearance which grows wild near the coast of New South Wales. Stretches of it are seen hugging the cliffs and down to beach level, either prostrate or several feet high depending on situation.

Description

It reaches at least 2 m high and 5 m across, often forming a regular dome with its lower branches covering the ground. It is useful as a large type of ground-cover plant. Sometimes it throws out one or two main branches to develop an irregular habit, but generally the plant is shapely. After reaching a mature size it does not deteriorate quickly with age as some species do, but maintains a good condition for years. During the coldest weather it keeps a fresh appearance and is also drought hardy, though adequate water should be given to avoid tendency to yellowing leaves and bare wood.

Flower

The flowers are 2 centimetres across set round the stems in the axils of the leaves. In shape they resemble other flowers of the mint family. They are from white to palest mauve with reddish and yellow brown spots near the throat. Though the shrub is never smothered in flowers, they are conspicuous against the dark foliage and are seen most months of the year except in extreme heat or cold. In November they are abundant.

Foliage

Foliage is a dark, even green, and a covering of short hairs on the young tip growth and leaf undersides gives a silvery tint which adds to its attractiveness. Leaves are up to 2 centimetres long, narrow and pointed and set closely in whorls around the stem. Westringias are in the mint family (Lamiaceae). The name 'Rosemary' refers to the appearance of the plant only, as the leaves have not the familiar aroma, though a light scent has been noticed in the flowers in one location.

Young plants raised from cuttings may be bought from nurseries and may be planted in any soil. Owing to its original habitat it is a good choice for a seaside garden, as it withstands salt spray. As a cut flower the stiff straight sprays are surprisingly handsome, especially where a large arrangement is wanted, as quite long sprays live well in water and continue to open their buds for weeks. Yet another use is as an indoor plant when it remains equally fresh in a reasonably cool atmosphere, and continues flowering.