

Enchylaena tomentosa

Common name – Ruby Saltbush

Enchylaena - *egchlos*, Greek for fleshy/succulent: *chlaena* – cloak, & *tomentosa* – Latin for covered with dense short curved hairs.

Enchylaena tomentosa (Ruby Saltbush), is a tough shrub native to Australia. It is well-adapted to arid and semi-arid areas.

It grows in every state across mainland Australia, typically found in the salt marshes of our tropical, sub-tropical and temperate regions. Ruby Saltbush possesses remarkable adaptations to survive in harsh conditions.

Its ability to tolerate salt-laden winds and saline soils makes it invaluable in coastal areas and saline environments. Additionally, it has deep roots that enable it to access moisture from deep within the soil. It prefers full sun but will also grow in dappled shade. It handles most soil and weather conditions - a healthy plant will survive saline soil, sandy soil, long droughts and even some frost.



Ruby Saltbushes are woody, low-growing spreading shrubs. Their leaves are small, oblong to lanceolate and up to 2 cm long. They are covered in fine silvery hairs that gives the plant its distinctive silvery-green look. They can reach a height of around 1 to 2 meters and have a spread of 1 to 2 meters depending on environmental conditions.

Flowers and Fruits

One of the most striking features of Ruby Saltbushes are their vibrant ruby-red fruits, which develop in clusters along the stems. The flowers, themselves, are small, greenish-yellow and inconspicuous. They are

arranged in clusters or spikes along the stems. They fruit and flower in late spring to early summer although they can fruit all year round. They produce edible berries about 5-8mm wide. These range in colour from green to yellow to the vibrant ruby red.



Uses

Indigenous communities have long used Ruby Saltbushes for food and medicines. The fruits were traditionally eaten fresh or dried, while various parts of the plant were used for medicines to treat ailments such as colds, coughs, and skin irritations. The berries are rich in vitamin C and may be eaten raw or soaked in water to make a sweet tea. The leaves are also edible, but because of their oxalate content, they should be cooked before eating, or should be consumed sparingly.

Due to their deep root system and dense foliage, Ruby Saltbushes play a crucial role in stabilizing soils, preventing erosion, and maintaining soil structure, especially in areas prone to desertification.

The berries of Ruby Saltbush are a vital food source for various native bird species, including emus, as well as small mammals and insects. The dense foliage also provides shelter for wildlife, contributing to biodiversity conservation.