



Friends of Venus Bay Peninsula Inc

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Plant of the month: Austral Stork's-bill *Pelargonium australe*



Austral Stork's-bill *Pelargonium australe* is a variable, hairy perennial herb with a fleshy taproot that is common at Venus Bay. It grows to around 60 cm tall and forms a many-flowered clump. The stems are rather succulent and hairy with pairs of long-stalked, aromatic, rounded, lobed leaves with incised margins. Both surfaces of the leaves are also softly hairy. White or pink flowers with purple veins occur in umbels or clusters of 4-12 on long stalks; mainly October to March. Of the five petals, two are longer than the other three standing close together.

Austral Stork's-bill is a coast-hardy, sand binding species that is an interesting and valuable addition to Venus Bay gardens. In summer, it may die back to its rootstock, when the old growth should be heavily pruned. It will then resprout after the autumn rains. It is hardy in a range of soils, tolerating drought and frost, and prefers full sun or light shade. Propagation is easy from cuttings and it also self-seeds readily.

The fleshy taproot may have been an Aboriginal food source.

Pelargonium species belong to the Geraniaceae Family, with about seven Australian members of the genus. *Pelargonium australe* is the best known and most widespread. The name derives from the Greek 'pelargos' meaning stork and referring to the shape of the fruits. Australe meaning 'southern' describes its global distribution.

Lorraine Norden (Dip. Hort.) For further information please visit FVBP website above. Photo: Lorraine Norden.