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Plant of the month: Bower Spinach *Tetragonia implexicoma*



Bower Spinach *Tetragonia implexicoma* is a trailing, scrambling or climbing perennial subshrub that can form tangled leafy hangings in coastal vegetation. It is often one of the front line colonisers of the sand dunes as can be seen here at Venus Bay. The bright green leaves are thick and succulent, angular-ovate diamond shaped, 2-6 cm long and 8-40 mm wide. The scented yellow flowers occur on stalks 5-30 mm long from the leaf axils and this can help to distinguish this species from the similar but much less common here, New Zealand Spinach *Tetragonia tetragonioides*, where the flowers are sessile (without a stem). Flowers occur for most of the year, peaking from August to February, followed by orange-red berries, blackening as they ripen.

Bower Spinach makes a good ground cover in dry sandy areas and can be used to stabilise the soil, tolerating salt-laden winds and full sun. If desired it can be maintained as a ground cover by pruning climbing stems. The 'bowers' provide habitat for wildlife and act as a weed suppressant and fire retardant. Aborigines cooked and ate the young shoots and leaves as a vegetable. Propagation is from fresh seed or cuttings.

Tetragonia belongs in the Aizoaceae family of scrambling herbs or shrubs with fleshy leaves and fruit. The genus name comes from the Greek, 'tetra', meaning four, and 'gonia', angle, after the 4-angled fruit. *Implexicoma* comes from 'implexa', tangled and 'comans', leafy.

For further information please visit FVBP website above. Photo: Lorraine Norden.