



## Friends of Venus Bay Peninsula Inc

ABN 17 536 241 485

PO Box 244 Venus Bay Vic 3956

Website: [www.friendsofvenusbaypeninsula.org.au](http://www.friendsofvenusbaypeninsula.org.au)

Email: [friendsofvbp@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofvbp@gmail.com)

### Plant of the month: Coast or Purple Swainson-pea *Swainsona lessertiifolia*



Coast Swainson-pea *Swainsona lessertiifolia* is a sprawling or scrambling perennial herb growing 10-50 cm high and up to 1 m wide. The dark green pinnate or divided leaves have 13-21 oblong leaflets that are notched at the tip, smooth above and softly hairy below. The spikes of rich purple (a rare white-flowered form has been found at Venus Bay) pea flowers have a whitish mark at the base and occur mainly from June to January. The oblong pod contains up to 20 seeds.

As indicated by its name, Coast Swainson-pea is found in coastal dune communities and tolerates calcareous (lime) soils, drought and salt spray, making it a useful ground cover for Venus Bay gardens. It needs to be hard pruned in winter to encourage vigorous new growth and flowering. Propagation is from scarified or heat treated seed, as for most plants in the pea family. The plant can be distinguished from the similar weed species Vetch by the lack of a tendrils at the end of the leaflets.

Coast Swainson-pea belongs to the Fabaceae or pea family; the five-petalled flowers are readily identifiable with their large upright standard, two wings and a central keel which is actually two petals fused on the upper edge. The genus *Swainsona* is named after English botanist Isaac Swainson and the species name *lessertiifolia* is named for its similarity to the South African species *Lessertia perennans*.

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