



Friends of Venus Bay Peninsula Inc

ABN 17 536 241 485

PO Box 244 Venus Bay Vic 3956

Website: www.friendsofvenusbaypeninsula.org.au

Email: friendsofvbp@gmail.com

Plant of the month: Cranberry Heath *Astroloma humifusum*



Cranberry Heath *Astroloma humifusum* is a dense, prostrate shrub to 50 cm tall, with spreading to erect branches, often forming large mats. The narrow leaves are bluish-green to 10 mm long with short hairy borders and a long sharp point, making the shrub very prickly to touch. The bright red tubular flowers occur along and are hidden in the branches for most of the year, peaking in autumn and winter. The fruits are small green succulent drupes (fleshy fruits with a stone) 5-10 mm diameter and are edible. Cranberry Heath is commonly found at Venus Bay as an understorey plant.

Cranberry Heath adds a welcome touch of colour in autumn when most other plants have finished flowering. The flowers provide nectar for birds. In cultivation it likes well-drained soils, tolerating dry periods once established. It is an excellent plant for rockeries or embankments and it responds well to pruning. Cranberry Heath is difficult to propagate but cuttings taken from firm young growth can be successful.

Cranberry Heath belongs to the heath or Epacridaceae family, of which another species *Epacris impressa* Common Heath is Victoria's floral emblem. The genus name *Astroloma* comes from the Greek, 'astron', meaning a star, and 'loma', meaning a fringe and refers to the tufts of hair inside the floral tube. All 28 *Astroloma* species are endemic to Australia and three occur in Victoria. The genus name *humifusum* means low growing and comes from the Latin 'humus', the ground.

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