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Plant of the month: Long Purple-flag *Patersonia occidentalis*



Long Purple-flag *Patersonia occidentalis* is a tufted perennial herb with flat, blue-green leaves with brown hairs on the margins and maroon bases, from 8-55 cm long x 2-10 mm wide. The flowering stem is longer than the foliage, to 80 cm and the bluish-purple, or occasionally white 3-petalled flowers are enclosed in 2 brown papery bracts. Each flower lasts only a short time but is followed by others in succession on the same stem, from September to January. The fruit is a 3-celled capsule that contains many dark brown seeds. Long Purple-flag is common in coastal heath and can also be seen along the roadside to Inverloch. It is the most common of five *Patersonia* species found in Victoria.

Long Purple-flag is frost-hardy and can survive long periods of dryness, although it prefers moist soil and is well suited for the edge of ponds. It provides a spectacular purple show mass planted in the garden or rockery. It propagates readily from seed.

Patersonia belongs in the Iridaceae or Iris family. The genus is named in honour of Col. William Paterson (1755-1810), a Scotsman with a keen interest in botany who travelled in South Africa in the 18th century and later became Lieutenant Governor of NSW 1800-1810 and founder of the City of Launceston. The species name *occidentalis* is Latin for western. For further information please visit FVBP website above. Photo: Lorraine Norden.

