



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: Small-leaved Clematis *Clematis microphylla*



Small-leaved Clematis *Clematis microphylla* is a variable dense medium-sized climber to 5 metres high, common at Venus Bay. The leaves are opposite, light green and finely divided 2-3 times, with 9 leaflets in groups of 3, up to around 5 cm x 2 cm. The stalks twine around other stems. The plants are dioecious (male and female flowers on separate plants). Masses of scented, cream starry flowers, downy below, smooth above, form in axillary (coming from the junction between the stem and the leaf) or terminal clusters, from July to October. The seeds have fluffy 'beards', providing another common name 'Old Man's Beard', for the genus.

The vigorous, tangled climbing habit of Small-leaved Clematis make it a desirable place for nest building. The perfumed winter flowers attract a variety of insect life including small flies, a bonanza which is appreciated by small, insectivorous birds at a difficult time of year. The old seeds make valuable nest building material. Pruning back hard will encourage new growth and keep the climber from becoming too unwieldy. The plant likes well-drained soil and will grow in full or part sun. Propagation is from seed, which may take several months to germinate, or stem cuttings.

The leaves can relieve skin irritation but may cause blisters unless used in moderation. The Aborigines ate the peppery-tasting young roots raw. The roots were also cooked and kneaded into dough.

Small-leaved Clematis belongs to the Ranunculaceae family. The genus name comes from the Greek 'klematis', a branch or twig, a diminutive of 'klema' a vine branch, alluding to the climbing habit. *Microphylla*, as the name suggests, means small leaf. There are four native species of *Clematis* in Victoria.