

Asparagus plumosus Baker

Family:

Asparagaceae

Baker, J.G. (1875) *Journal of the Linnean Society, Botany 14* : 613. Type: South Africa; syn: Port Natal, J. F. Drege 4482; K; British Kaffraria, Cooper 202; K; Durban; Gerrard & Mken 754; TCD.

Common name:

Ferny Asparagus; Climbing Asparagus Fern

Stem

A slender vine not exceeding a stem diameter of 2 cm.

Leaves

True leaves absent. Cladodes filiform, about 4-7 mm long, aggregated in fascicles. Stems tough and wiry, armed with recurved spines.

Flowers

Flowers single or paired, pendulous, about 5-7 mm diam. Pedicels about 1-2.5 mm long. Tepals about 3-4 x 1-1.5 mm. Staminal filaments about 2-3 mm long, anthers about 0.5 mm long. Ovary globose, about 2 mm diam. Style about 0.5-1 mm long, trifid.

Fruit

Fruits depressed globular, about 5-6 mm diam. Perianth lobes dry and chaffy, persistent at the base of the fruit. Seeds globular, about 3.5 mm diam. Embryo about 3 mm diam.

Seedlings

About 4 or 5 translucent cataphylls produced before the first linear-filiform, green cladode. The first true green leaves (actually cladodes) appear as a pair in the axil of the translucent cataphyll. At the tenth leaf stage: leaves, i.e. cladodes, produced in clusters of 5-8. Cladodes linear-filiform, without venation. Cataphylls or bracts are produced at each major branch among the cladodes. Cladodes variable in length but commonly about 7-8 mm long. Seed germination time 184 days.

Distribution and Ecology

An introduced species originally from southern Africa, now naturalised in NEQ, CEQ and southwards to New South Wales and South Australia. Altitudinal range in NEQ from near sea level to 800 m. Usually grows near settlements or in old gardens but also on rain forest edges or in disturbed areas in rain forest.

Natural History & Notes

This commonly cultivated plant has now escaped and can be found over a wide range in various habitats. Seed is dispersed by birds.

RFK Code

2634



Foliage and fruit. © CSIRO



Scale bar 10mm. © CSIRO



10th leaf stage. © CSIRO



Cotyledon stage, hypogeal germination. © CSIRO



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