

Asparagus racemosus Willd.

Family:

Asparagaceae

Willdenow, C.L. von (1799) *Sp. Pl.* 2: 152. Type: India, herb Willdenow; holo: B. Fide A. A. Obermeyer, S. African J. Bot. 2: 243 - 244 (1983).

Common name:

Asparagus Fern; Native Asparagus Fern

Stem

Usually grows as a vine but can also flower and fruit as a shrub. A slender vine not exceeding a stem diameter of 2 cm

Leaves

True leaves absent. Cladodes, +/- triangular in transverse section, each about 15-19 x 0.2-0.5 mm, glabrous, longitudinally grooved. Midrib not visible. Twigs often armed with curved spines about 1-5 mm long. Cladodes produced in whorls opposite, or alternately on the twigs.

Flowers

Tepals obovate, about 4 x 1.5 mm. Stamens six, free, filaments about 3-5 mm long, flattened, glabrous. Anthers about 0.6 x 0.5 mm. Style short or absent, stigma 3-lobed, about 0.5 mm long.

Fruit

Fruit about 5-6 mm diam. Seeds globose, about 4-5 mm diam. Testa thin, shiny black. Embryo linear, about 2 mm long.

Seedlings

The first appendages produced on the stem of the seedling look like cataphylls and although they lack chlorophyll they are probably the first true leaves and are about 2-2.5 mm long. The first green appendages are simple linear cladodes about 1.5 cm long. The seedling subsequently produces branched cladodes in the axils of the simple cladodes and at other places and the whole structure soon becomes complex. Seed germination time 206 days.

Distribution and Ecology

An introduced species in WA, NT, CYP, NEQ, CEQ and southwards as far as south-eastern Queensland. Altitudinal range in northern Australia from near sea level to 900 m. Grows in a variety of habitats including open forest but probably most frequently encountered in monsoon forest and vine thickets. Also occurs in Asia and Malesia.

Natural History & Notes

An attractive plant similar to *Asparagus plumosus* that is now coming into cultivation.

This species may have medicinal properties.

In India the root of this plant has been used as a tonic and diuretic, and for stimulating milk in nursing mothers. It had also some reputation as an ingredient of an aphrodisiac, and of a fertility drug for women. Cribb (1981).

Synonyms

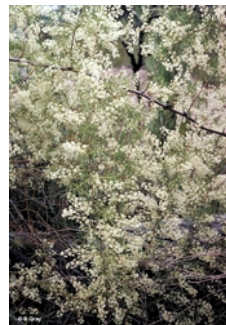
***Asparagus fasciculatus* R.Br.**, *Prodromus Florae Novae Hollandiae* : 281(1810), Type: Tropical Australia, R. Brown; holo: BM. ***Asparagus acerosus* Roxb.**, *Fl. Indica 2nd edn.* 2: 150(1832), Type: India, Bengal.

RFK Code

2509



Foliage and fruit. © A. Ford & F. Goulter



Habit and flowers. © B. Gray



Scale bar 10mm. © CSIRO



Cotyledon and 10th leaf stage, hypogeal germination. © CSIRO



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