

Show and tell A native *Senna* on the far south coast

Jackie Miles

Most South Coast gardeners, if they recognise the name *Senna* at all, would immediately think of the three common garden escapee weeds *Senna septemtrionalis* (formerly known as *S. x floribunda*), *S. pendula* and *S. multiglandulosa*. This genus was previously called *Cassia* and some people might still recognise them under that name. **Few would be aware that there are two local native *Senna* species, *Senna aciphylla* and *Senna odorata*.** The genus, part of the **Caesalpinoidae** subfamily of the peas, has 25 representatives in NSW, of which only 5 are introduced. Most of the rest reside in inland Australia, but a few are coastal, mostly found in wetter forest types on the central and north coast.

The most obvious feature distinguishing the local natives from the three weedy species found here is that the seed pods of the natives are flattened, while those of the weeds are plump and cylindrical in shape. The flowers of the weedy three have only 6 or 7 fertile anthers, the other three or four being reduced or absent, while the natives have all ten anthers fertile.

Senna odorata prefers a wetter type of forest habitat (“sclerophyll communities and on margins of rainforest, north from Bega district” according to the Flora of NSW). I have only seen this species in two locations within Eurobodalla Shire and none in Bega Valley, on the Tuross River banks and at Trunketabella. It is a straggly shrub to about 2.5 metres high.

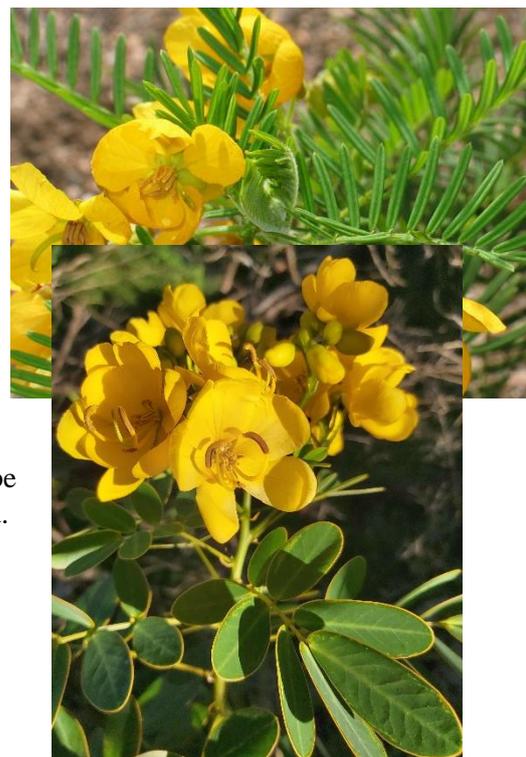
Senna aciphylla is an exception to this habitat preference as it appears to favour rock outcrops. It is never common, but I have recorded one to a few plants from varied locations on the far south coast, from Brogo, Burragate and on Goalen Head south of Bermagui.

I have also seen it growing at Bungonia on limestone outcrops, as the photo to the right shows.

It is a more compact plant from what I have seen, growing as it does in full sun. I have it in my garden where it has persisted for many years (I forget the original seed source now, but most likely one of the three south coast locations mentioned). Although the Flora of NSW says it can get to 2 metres, mine have never made it over a metre, with a spread of about 1.5 metres. The pinnate foliage is an attractive bright green and the yellow flowers are very similar to those of the exotic species.

In over a decade of residence it has never shown the slightest inclination to reproduce, although it produces copious seed every year. That is until the “breaking” of the drought in February this year, when suddenly at least 50 seedlings appeared under and around the parent plants. I assume the extreme dryness and heat of the summer had finally allowed the seed coat to be scarified enough to permit germination. Weeks on end of exposure to smoke may have also played a part. I have transplanted a few of these and they are growing painfully slowly, suggesting that perhaps they have need of some soil organism that is lacking in the area they were moved to. Or it may just be that I am not keeping the water up to them as conscientiously as I should.

I may be able to supply a small amount of seed eventually as the mature plant has some green pods on it.



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Introduced weedy Senna, such as *S.septentrionalis*, and *S. pendula* var. *glabrata* (pictured) which is currently flowering prolifically in areas around Batemans Bay that were not burned in the recent fires. It produces copious seed which germinates readily. It is possibly spread by birds deep into surrounding bush areas. If you come across this plant, you should endeavour to have it removed. Like other environmental weeds it quickly displaces native flora.