

Glycine *latrobeana*

This is a very special specimen because it was collected by Charles La Trobe and he sent it to the Swiss botanist Carl Daniel Friedrich Meisner (1800-1874) who was based at the University of Basel for 40 years. Meisner described many Australian plants especially plants of the Proteacea family, Fabaceae (Pea) family and the Myrtaceae (Eucalypt) family.

Botanical Name

Glycine latrobeana

syn. *Leptocyamus tasmanicus*

syn. *Zichya latrobeana*

(syn. Indicates there has been a name change)

Common Name

Clover glycine, Purple glycine

Family

Fabaceae

The specimen was collected by Charles La Trobe from the Port Phillip District, 1841. (Remember that Port Phillip District was the name of Victoria prior to separation from New South Wales in 1851).

As outlined above, La Trobe collected the specimen and sent it to Carl Meisner. He described it as *Zichya latrobeana*. However, Meisner had doubts that it was in the genus *Zichya* (which is indicated by the '(?)' on this specimen, but his description was published by the German botanist J.G.C. Lehmann in his book *Plantae Preissianae* in 1844. In 1836 Ronald Gunn (friend of La Trobe) had also collected a specimen in Tasmania and in 1855 it was described by the English botanist George Bentham as *Leptocyamus tasmanicus* and was published in *Flora of Tasmania*, Volume 1, of John Hooker Jr. Then in 1864 *Zichya latrobeana* was re-examined by George Bentham and he re-classified it as *Glycine latrobeana*.



Plants are classified by the structure of their floral parts and as technology improves botanists are able to see finer and finer detail, thus plants are often renamed. This was the case with the glycine. It has been found that it has similar flowering characteristics, and therefore it is related, to the Soya Bean (*Glycine max*). There are about sixteen wild species in this genus. In 1956 *Leptocyamus tasmanicus* became a synonym for *Glycine latrobeana*.

One reason why plants in the 18th century have many names is that communication between people was much slower and cross-referencing would have been very difficult. Also, many plants can look very similar and be in the same family but are not in the same genus. Or they are in the same genus but can have evolved in different locations and developed slight variations. This makes identifying really difficult and it is not until all the plant's structures are carefully scrutinised that differences can be identified.

For details about the sketch of *Zichya latrobeana* by Edward La Trobe Bateman, in the National Gallery of Victoria collection visit their website:

www.ngv.vic.gov.au/col/work/30212



Description

Glycine latrobeana is a small perennial herb with leaves that look similar to common pasture clover and has purple flowers. Its habitat is in woodlands, lowlands, sclerophyll forests, low open woodlands with a grassy ground cover, native grasslands and montane grasslands. It is found down the south-eastern coast of Australia from southern New South Wales to Victoria, including Gippsland, the Wimmera and Grampians, across to South Australia in the south-east of the state and in the Mt. Lofty Ranges. It also occurs in the Central Highlands and north-east and east coast of Tasmania. Several populations have been found close to Melbourne in the Brimbank and Hume City Councils and the Brisbane Ranges.

We have two plants in our garden at the Cottage, donated to us by the Euroa Arboretum. One is planted under the Turkey bush (*Eremophila maculate*) in the Weeping Elm bed and the other one is now also in the same bed, as it was not thriving in the Succulent bed under the *Acacia acinaceae* syn *Acacia latrobei*.

Status

It is a threatened species and its legal status is as follows:

- **National:** Listed as **Vulnerable** under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*
- **South Australia:** Listed as **Vulnerable** under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*
- **Tasmania:** Listed as **Vulnerable** under the *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*
- **Victoria:** Listed as **Threatened** under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.

Its habitat has been disturbed since European settlement for the following reasons:

- Grazing of cattle and sheep
- Early gold mining practices
- Poor fire practices
- Urban growth fragmenting its habitat
- Weeds
- Phytophthora Root Rot fungus.

If you would like more information visit

www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon_id=13010#description

As Meisner's health deteriorated, he organised that his collection be purchased by John J. Crooke, who was a patron of botany in America. It was then donated to the Chapman Herbarium at Columbia University and became a part of the Torrey Collection. John Torrey (1796-1873) was one of America's leading botanists. This specimen now belongs to the New York Herbarium at the New York Botanic Garden.

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