

Descriptions of major dune plants

Angular pigface (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*)

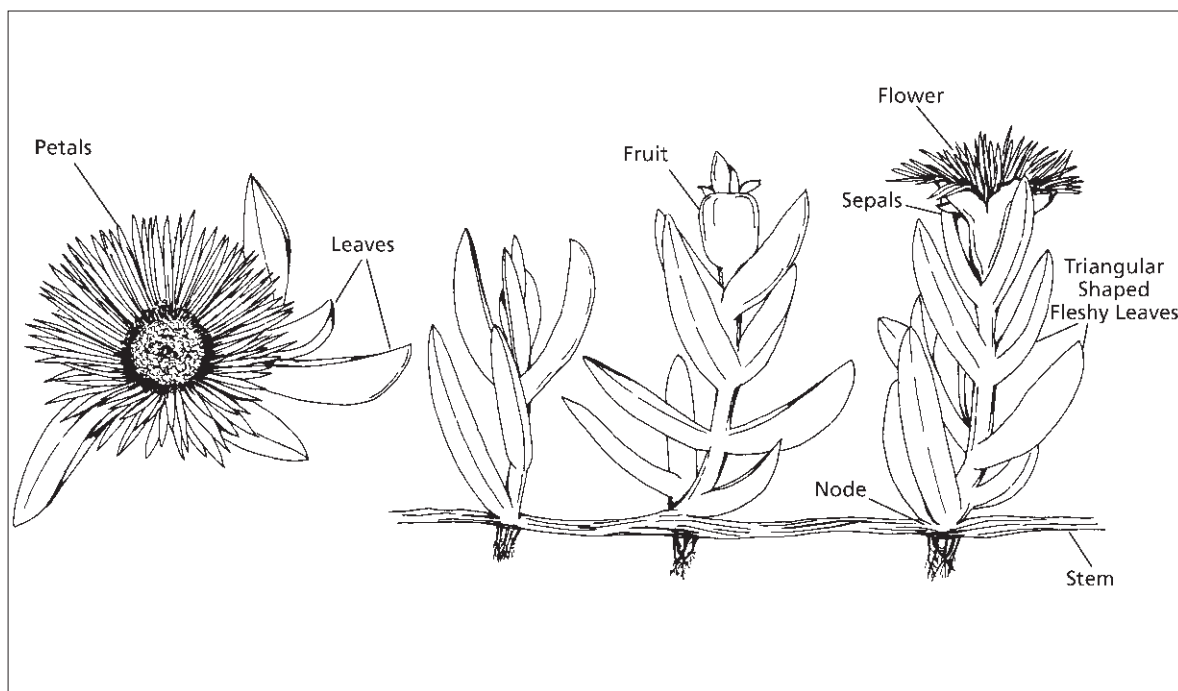
Description

Pigface is a prostrate, succulent, perennial herb with creeping stems which root at the nodes when in contact with the sand and produce numerous upright leafy branches. These green stems are up to 2m long and 5-10mm thick. They often turn reddish-brown with age.

The leaves are fleshy, smooth, opposite and roughly triangular in cross-section. They vary in length from 3.5cm to 10cm, and the sides are usually 1cm wide, narrowing towards the tip. Younger leaves are bluish-green and the older ones are often pinkish-red.

The stems bearing the flowers are upright and usually do not branch until the flowers have withered. The purple-red flowers are large, 4-6 cm across, and are supported on a short stalk up to 2cm long. Each flower has five sepals and numerous, shiny, purple petals which shade to white at or near the base.

The fruit is a succulent, edible berry, red to purple in colour. It is somewhat cylindrical in shape, about 2cm long and 1cm wide, with two small leaf-like structures at the top. The fruit contains a number of smooth, light brown seeds and falls from the plant when ripe.



Distribution

Pigface is a native plant of Australia and is commonly found on coastal sand dunes. It grows on the beach and dunes along the north coast of New South Wales and in Queensland from the Tweed River north to Rockhampton.

Function

Pigface is a secondary sand stabiliser. It usually grows on dunes after they have been stabilised by the more effective sand-binding plants such as sand spinifex grass and goat's foot convulvulus. The stems spread over the surface of the sand and produce roots at the nodes. New runners also form at these nodes, and further growth results in a dense cover of vegetation which binds the sand, preventing wind erosion.

If covered with a small quantity of sand, the plant will survive and grow upwards, producing a new 'mat' over the previous one. When growing on its own, pigface often forms hummocks of trapped wind-blown sand. This plant is often killed if buried under sand for a long time. This plant grows on the upper part of the seaward slope, the crest and landward slope of the frontal dune. It is capable of withstanding salt spray, strong winds and sand blast.

Propagation

Pigface is chiefly a spring- and summer-growing plant. It flowers from October to January, but in protected dune areas often flowers at different times during the year. Seed germinates slowly but the plant can be propagated easily using 'layers' (rooted horizontal stem cuttings) established in the nursery or planted direct in the field. Layers should be 30cm long and planted leaving about 5cm of the plant above the surface. Pigface seldom provides complete cover over large areas and is best planted in combination with other plants such as sand spinifex and goat's foot convulvulus. It prefers an open sunny position and best results are obtained from spring plantings at 1m centres. Scouring may take place between plants if they are further apart.



Pigface growing in clumps on the seaward slope of the frontal dune.