

Parietaria debilis

G.Forster

NATIVE PELLITORY

Flowering period: August–October.

Description: Annual herb. Leafy and usually less than 30 cm tall during winter; leggy and up to 60 cm or more by late spring. Grows under or in small gaps between low shrubs, or in the dappled shade of taller vegetation. Leaves mid green. Leaf-blade ovate, 7–55 mm long, 5–30 mm wide; leaf petiole 5–40 mm long. Flowers tiny, green, in small clusters in leaf-axils. Fruiting calyx up to 3 mm long. Nut brown, glossy, ovoid, 1 mm or more long.

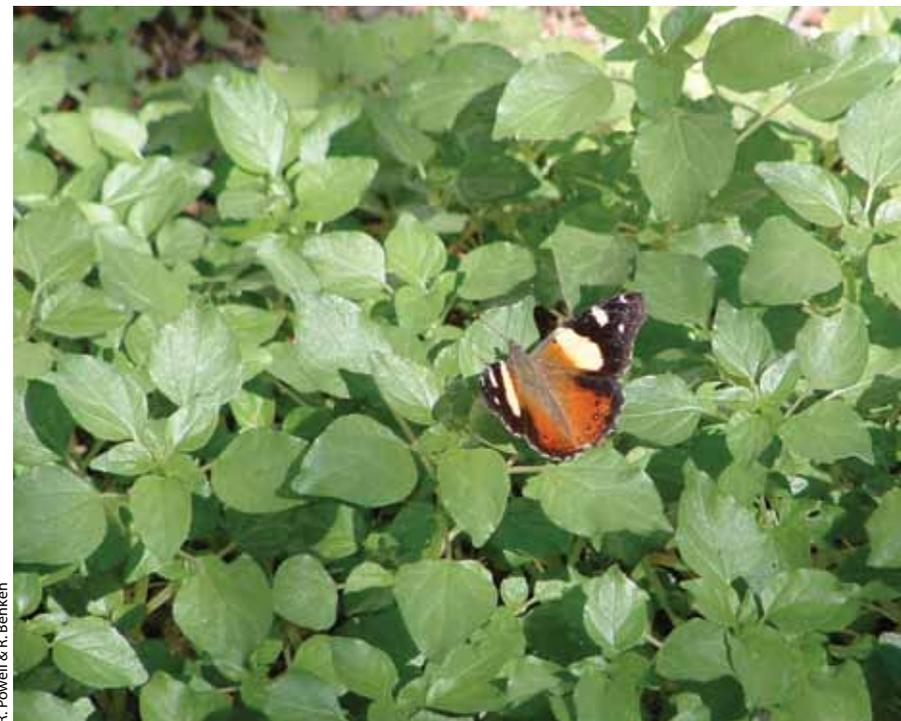
Pollination: Wind pollinated.

Distribution: Near the coast, from North-West Cape to the South Australian border; also in many inland localities in the southern half of WA, including the southern deserts. Has greatly declined; however, through disturbance and competition from weeds. Does not generally occur in the primary dunes, but is typical of the secondary dunes.

Propagation: Germinates readily from broadcast seeds (nuts). The nuts are easily collected from dry, dead plants in November to January, by running the fingers along the stems and collecting the material. If necessary, the nuts can be separated by sieving. In autumn, scatter nuts or collected material (mixed with a little dry sand to increase their bulk), over a spot with dappled shade. Periodically, after the plants germinate, the site should be carefully hand-weeded – not necessarily thoroughly, as long as enough weeds are removed to reduce most of their competition. Pellitory plants, particularly if strong and healthy, seed well and produce a good crop of plants the following winter.

Uses in restoration: Native pellitory is one of very few plants on which a migratory butterfly, the yellow admiral (*Vanessa itea*), lays its eggs and breeds. Coastcare and bushland groups and home gardeners grow native pellitory both for this reason and simply for the satisfaction of re-establishing this typical coastal annual.

Notes: Grows well in suburban gardens where introduced brown snails (*Cantareus aspersus*) are largely absent. Likes enriched soil, and often does particularly well in vegetable patches. Another, less common species of native pellitory, *P. cardiostegia*, occurs from Perth northwards. It is distinguished from *P. debilis* by larger, heart-shaped bracts associated with its flowers and fruits. The two species have similar uses and requirements.



R. Powell & R. Benken

Habit



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Admiral butterfly and flowers



Distribution