

Chinese Forget-me- nots *Cynoglossum* *amabile*

Charming Forget-me-nots, the delicate blue flowers that bring back memories of our grandparents' gardens!

Forget-me-not is a common name also used for another closely related genus, *Myosotis*. Like *Cynoglossum*, it belongs to the Boraginaceae family, of which there are about 2,500 species scattered across temperate and tropical regions of the world, with the greatest diversity in areas surrounding the Mediterranean. Most are annual, biennial or perennial plants, very few are shrubs, trees or climbers. There are about 20 genera native to Australia.

In its natural environment, *Cynoglossum amabile*, the **Chinese Forget-me-not**, grows in hillside meadows, in forests, alongside roads and on riverbanks in mountainous areas between 2,600 to 3,700 m asl in

southern and south-western provinces of China and in Bhutan.

In many parts of the world, including Australia, it is a much-loved garden plant – a drought resistant and heat tolerant annual that produces an abundance of flowers and seeds. Once established in a garden, there is rarely any need to sow more seeds.

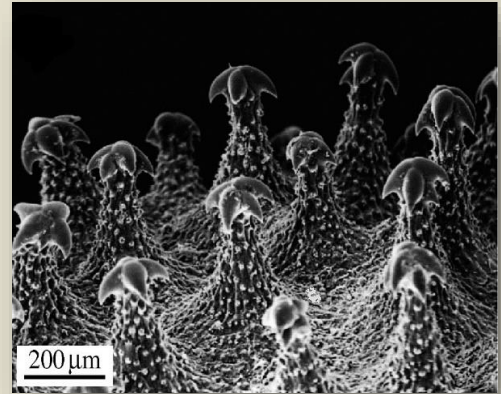




The flowers may be small and delicate, but Forget-me-not seeds also have a malevolent streak, sticking to clothing, shoes and pets' coats. Seeds equipped with hooks, barbs and curved hairs are a characteristic of many Boraginaceae species, facilitating transfer to new

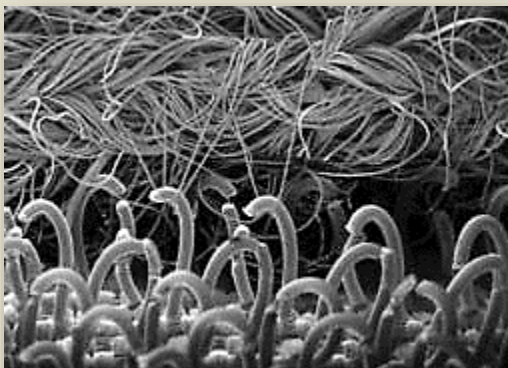


locations well away from parent plants. Seeds armed in this way are often referred to as *hitchhikers*. We are inclined to think it is their propensity to attach to clothing that has led to the name *Forget-me-not*.



The closely related Houndstooth, *Cynoglossum officinale*, from Europe, has hairs with lateral barbed hooks to aid seed dispersal. Image from Bhushan 2009.

Another pattern of hooks and loops in the totally unrelated plant, Burdock, *Arctium minor* (Daisy family, Asteraceae), was the inspiration for *Velcro*, *hook and loop fasteners*, by Swiss electrical engineer, George de Mestral. In 1948, he took his dog for a walk, and when he returned home, he wondered how and why Burdock seeds stuck so determinedly to his clothes and to his dog's fur. His subsequent invention, *Velcro*, with stiff hooks on one side, and fabric loops on the other, replicated what he had observed in Burdock seeds. This process of copying elements from nature to solve complex human problems is known as biomimicry, or biomimetics:-



Hooks and loops in *Velcro*
(Bhushan 2009, Mueller 2008)



Arctium minor – Burdock. Photo: Epukas, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

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