

Bird of Paradise, *Strelitzia*

Throughout the world, the Bird of Paradise is known for its cut flowers. It is indigenous to the Eastern Cape, South Africa, growing along rivers and close to the coast. Its stiff, upright leaves form dense clumps. They emerge from the base without any branching, creating a bouquet of exotic flowers on top of lush green foliage. The bush is about 1.5 metres high, but from autumn to spring imposing flowers stand above the leaves. A horizontal spathe resembles a bird's head. Flowers are raised one by one from this sheath, consisting of three orange sepals and three dark-blue petals each. Pollination is by birds. Strelitzias do not have many particular site requirements. With frequent irrigation, the plants thrive in full sun, but also produce flowers in partial shade. A rich soil with loam and compost is the most suitable, and occasional fertilising guarantees vital growth of healthy leaves and flowers. Hailing from coastal regions, they tolerate some salinity in the water applied, and withstand strong winds without damage. Low temperatures are tolerated as long as there are no frosts. They make a strong accent in sheltered gardens in Arriyadh. Bird of Paradise plants flourish in containers and look well as accent plants, either singly or grouped. The spectacular flowers should be accessible to enable pedestrians to take a closer look. Sowing in spring may result in flowering offspring within three to five years. Another method of propagation is division in autumn, which is usually combined with transplanting mature clumps.



GENERAL

Origin	: sub-tropical, tropical
Vigour	: fast growing
Humidity	: semi-humid, very humid, very humid
Propagation	: sowing and pricking out, division
Maintenance	: moderate

CONDITIONS

Urban climate	: vulnerable
Dessication	: vulnerable
Stagnant water	: vulnerable
Irrigation	: high
Salinity/ppm	: moderate (1800 ppm)
Hardiness	: 0°C

SHAPE

Type	: perennial, shrub
Height	: 1 m-2 m
Spread	: 1.5 m-3 m
Foliage	: evergreen

FLOWER

Colour	: orange, blue
Size	: 15 cm
Period	: April - November

FRUIT

Type of fruit	: capsule
Fruit size	: 4 cm