

Coral Fountain, *Firecracker Plant*

The Firecracker Plant originates from tropical and subtropical regions between Mexico and Peru. Its green stems perform photosynthesis, while the foliage has degenerated to tiny, short-lived scales. It is widely distributed in frost-free regions for its year-round flowering, with its peak in summer and early autumn. Reaching up to 3 cm in length, the tubular flowers appear mainly at the twigs' end, where they are pollinated by insects. Seeds develop in capsules and are best harvested by attaching a bag to the branches. Sowing is one way to multiply this plant, but softwood cuttings also grow easily. The latter method is necessary to achieve plants with similar characteristics. Some cultivars have flowers in a yellow or cream colour. In open ground, this plant forms a green fountain, when hundreds of wiry twigs sprout up and topple over when extending their length. In this manner they reach a height of 1.5 metres and a width of 2 metres. The virtues of *Russelia* are much better presented where it cascades over a wall or the edges of a raised container. It demands good drainage and tolerates some drought when established. Frequent irrigation and regular fertilising guarantee healthy growth and sustained flowering. Exposure to wind is accepted, and Firecracker Plants tolerate both acidic and alkaline soils. It has adapted well to the conditions in Arriyadh, and planted in masses it makes an attractive area cover on slopes. Maintenance is limited to occasional cutting back to rejuvenate growth every two or three years.



GENERAL

Origin	: Mediterranean, sub-tropical
Vigour	: fairly fast growing
Humidity	: semi-arid, semi-humid, very humid, extremely humid
Propagation	: sowing and pricking out, cuttings
Maintenance	: moderate

CONDITIONS

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

SHAPE

Type	: shrub
Height	: 1 m-1.5 m
Spread	: 1.5 m-2 m
Foliage	: deciduous

FLOWER

Colour	: bright red
Size	: 2 cm - 3 cm
Period	: May - October

FRUIT

Type of fruit	: capsule
Fruit size	: 0.6 cm