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Tips on Growing Bougainvilleas

Growing this colourful plant from the tropics in this country does not require a tropical greenhouse or conservatory. They are by nature climbers using their strong shoots and curved thorns rather than twining.

All you need is to follow a few simple guidelines and you can enjoy the wide range of coloured bracts which surround the Bougainvillea's flowers.

Situation

The plant is best grown in full sun in a conservatory, windowsill or porch.

Like citrus plants the bougainvillea can be grown outside during the summer, (June until September).

During the rest of the year they must be kept in a frost free position.

If you can grow them during the winter with temperatures above 10°C then they will hold their leaves and flower for some months, below that they become deciduous. They will sprout new leaves as the temperatures and light levels rise.

Plant Care

Watering

During the growing season soak well and allow to dry slightly, but not to the point of wilting before watering again.

During winter and if dormant use water sparingly.

Feeding

Regular feeding, (every seven days) during the active phase of growth will improve both the amount of growth and the bract colour.

To stimulate growth use a high nitrogen fertilizer such as Miracle-Gro.

This is then followed up when sufficient growth has been made by a high potash fertilizer, such as a tomato feed, to encourage bract/flower development.

Alternating this feeding program will encourage a succession of growth and bracts.

Bougainvillea leaves can often show signs of chlorosis, (leaf yellowing). To counteract this use a sequestered iron and magnesium sulphate, (Epsom salts).

It is essential that the compost is moist before feeding.

Always read the label and follow the advice.

Potting

When your plant needs repotting, remembering that Bougainvilleas do like to be a little pot bound.

Repot in the spring when coming into growth and use a terracotta pot and John Innes No.3 potting compost. Do not over firm but allow the watering to firm the compost.

Pruning

Regular light pruning will keep your plant in shape and under control. This is best done after flowering by removing the faded bracts to encourage new growth. Bougainvilleas often have a habit of sending long 'water shoots' up. These can be removed at the base or kept and tied in.

Training

Bougainvilleas can be grown in many forms and shapes. They can be very impressive grown as a standard or globe, even grown as bonsai. If grown permanently in a greenhouse or conservatory they should be trained on a trellis or wires for support.

Pest & Disease

Bougainvilleas can sometimes be attacked by aphid when outside in the summer and by red spider mite and scale under glass. These can be controlled by the many retail products available. Ask one of our staff for up to date advice.