

Plant Cultivation Notes

Protea

These are general cultivation notes for all our Protea species, including Luecadendron. Protea have been successfully cultivated in the south west of the UK and southern Europe for some time. However after several bad winters it is now considered best to cultivate these fantastic plants in pots and give them winter protection under glass or an unheated conservatory.

South Africa's Proteas have adapted to their environment and it is worth looking at the conditions that they are found in to better understand their requirements in cultivation. Generally Proteas are found growing in open sites, in poor soils that are extremely friable. The areas in which Proteas grow are often ravaged by bush fires and dry winters and Proteas have adapted to these conditions. They have a fine root system just below the soil surface, this root system is fantastic at extracting the small amount of nutrients and water available. Fire encourages new growth and in fact some Protea need fire to stimulate the germination of their seeds. The open nature of the areas Protea are found in means that moisture is quickly dissipated and the poor, friable nature of the soils, means that water in the soil quickly drains away.

In Cultivation Proteas need their natural requirements to be simulated:

Start with the potting mix. It must be extremely free draining, slightly acidic and must contain no phosphates. This practically means that all composts available in your local garden centre can not be used as they all contain high levels of phosphates. Mix your own compost using the following: Pine needles, Coir, Vermiculite, Perlite, fine pine bark chips, charcoal, grit and sharp sand. If you do not want to mix your own compost, you can buy specialist Protea compost from us, which also contains a slow release phosphate free fertilizer.

Choose a pot with plenty of drainage holes and add lots of crocks and never over pot. Pot up into a pot only slightly bigger than the last.

Proteas hate stagnant, humid conditions so always have your plant in a well ventilated position. This also means that during winter your plant needs a extremely well ventilated situation. During winter watering should be cut back. Water only to stopping the roots from completely drying out (maybe once a week-dependent on temperature)

Throughout the year watering is best done during the morning and try to water the compost only and not the plant, as moisture on the leaves can cause rot to set in. We use rain water to water our Protea here at Blue Nurseries, this is because we find that there are high levels of contaminates in tap water. Protea are a sensitive to chemicals as orchids.

Watering the free draining compost your Protea is in should be on a regular basis- do not let your plant dry out as it will fail quickly if left dry, particularly in summer.

Feeding Protea is an issue. Most fertilizers contain phosphates and phosphates will quickly kill Protea. Specialist Protea fertilizers are available that have an NPK (Nitrate, Phosphate, Potassium) value as follows: 24:0:16

Pruning Protea is only necessary to remove dead or damaged stems.

Cultivation summary:

- ★Free draining compost that is phosphate free.
- ★Good ventilation and low humidity
- ★Water when top two inches of compost is dry and use rain water when possible
- ★Pot up in small stages
- ★Overwinter in bright, well ventilated, frost free environment.

Protea are challenging but rewarding plants, please let us know how you get on!