

Bird of paradise

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Bird of paradise is a flowering plant indigenous to South Africa. It is commonly called as crane flower, Sterlitzia or bird of paradise. It is botanically called as *Strelitzia reginae*, belongs to the family Musaceae. It is a unique flower, resembling a brightly coloured bird in flight, so it is called as bird of paradise. There are two species related to this group.

S. alba : It grows up to 18" height producing white flowers.

S. nicolai : It is a giant one, resembling a fan leaf palm and the inflorescence is reddish brown.



S. caudata : Mountain strelitzia

S. juncea : African desert banana

Strelitzia is very popular an ornamental plant. Florida, U.S.A and California are the main areas of cultivation. It was first introduced to Europe in 1778, when it was grown at the Royal botanical Gardens, Kew. Since, then it has been widely introduced around the world including America and Australia. It is grown well in ay area that is sunny and warm. In Southern California, it is a common ornamental plant. The plant grows to 2m height, with large, strong



leaves 25-75 cm long.

Strelitzia grows well in light and porous soil, rich in organic matter is good for this plant. Bird of paradise prefers the full sun but tolerates lower light levels. It prefers sub tropical climate with an elevation of 1000 – 1500 m MSL. It requires an optimum temperature of about 25 – 45° C for its better growth. It requires a light intensity of 4000 – 8000 feet candles, but can tolerate 2000 ft candles.

Bird of paradise is propagated by division of old clumps. Care should be taken while separating clumps, as the plant is deep rooted. Propagation through seeds takes about 3-5 years for commercial production. The seeds are scarified in luke warm water for several hours. The seed

coat is nicked with a small knife before sowing in the medium. It takes about 2- 3 months for germination. The germination is improved by vernalisation of seeds at 4–5° C for two to three weeks before sowing. Seedlings at two leaf stage are transplanted in poly bags or pots.

The land is prepared to fine tilth. Pits of size 40 x 40 x 40 cm at 1.25 x 1.25 m spacing are prepared. About 5 kgs of cattle manure, 200 g bone meal and 500g neem cake are added per pit. It is mixed thoroughly with the soil and planting is taken up.

The beds are always maintained at optimum moisture level. They can be provided with drip or sprinkler irrigation. Too much of moisture with water logged condition damages roots and results in death of plants. Low moisture level and stagnation of water around the plant slows down the growth. Judicious application of water is important for successful production of this crop.

It is slow growing plant, it is always better to apply more of slow release fertilizers like bone meal, cattle manure, neem cake, castor cake, coir pith compost etc., A fertilizer dose of 11/2 – 2 kgs of 6:6:6 NPK per 100 sq.mt. bed area is recommended for every three months. It is better to add 500 g neem cake every two months per plant to get maximum benefits.

Bird of paradise is comparatively free from pests, However, the plants are affected by scales and mealy bugs, which are controlled by spraying Meatsystox 1%. The flowers are also affected by *Botrytis cineria* and *Fusarium cumorum*. Spraying of Bavistin 0.1 % is effective in controlling the disease.

The side suckers starts flowering in the second year itself. The plants raised from seed takes 3 – 5 years for commercial production. Flowers are harvested with long stalk at full opening stage and kept in water for 2 – 3 hours at 10° C before packing. The flower spikes are stored at 7 to 10° C after pulsing with 10 % Sucrose or 250 ppm HQC or 150 ppm of citric acid for 40 hours at 22° C wrapped in paper and packed in boxes lined with polythene foil.

Flowers generally last for 7 to 14 days and adding preservative in holding solutions has no effect on longevity of flowers spike. Recutting of stem is effective for increasing the vase life. It yield about 15 – 25 flower spikes per plant per year.

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