

Actinidia arguta – Hardy Kiwifruit

Actinidia prefers a loamy neutral soil but will tolerate acid and moderately alkaline soils. Succeeds in semi-shade but full sun is best for fruit production in a sheltered position. A very hardy plant, tolerating temperatures down to -30°C or more, but the young spring growth is susceptible to frost damage. Some cultivars are said to tolerate temperatures down to about -50°C when fully dormant! This species is often cultivated for its edible fruit and there are some named varieties, note that this is a polymorphic species. Plants are usually dioecious but the cultivar 'Issai' is self-fertile.

Fruits are formed on second year wood and also on fruit spurs on older wood, so any pruning is best carried out in the Winter. Plants only flower when grown in warm climates, these are small and sweetly scented.

Actinidia is a climbing plant, supporting itself by twining around branches etc. Male and female plants must usually be grown if seed is required. Plants in this genus are notably resistant to honey fungus.

Propagation

Seed – Sow in Spring in a greenhouse. It is probably best if the seed is given 3 months stratification, either sow it in a cold frame as soon as it is ripe in November or as soon as it is received. Fresh seed germinates in 2 - 3 months at 10°C, stored seed can take longer. When they are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and grow them on in light shade in the greenhouse for at least their first winter. When the plants reach 30cm or more in height, plant them out into their permanent positions in late Spring or early Summer after the last expected frosts. Most seedlings will be male. The seedlings are subject to damping off, so they must be kept well ventilated.