

Castanospermum australe – Blackbean/Moreton Bay Chestnut

The Blackbean or Moreton Bay Chestnut is another of the versatile and very beautiful rainforest species. Growing to a tree of about 40m ultimately it has dark glossy foliage with attractive elliptical leaves to 2cm. In the spring it is glorious with its large red and yellow pea flowers to 4cm. These are borne on the old wood. The large boat-shaped seed pods grow up to 25cm and can be used in craft activities or interesting ornaments. Some caution must be exercised as the seed is poisonous as is the foliage to ruminous stock.

It can be a feature tree or used as an interesting indoor and pot/tub item while small and there is an endless variety to the way it is used as a feature. Remember though that as blooms form on the old wood heavy indiscriminate pruning will affect flowering and that this is a tropical species with little real frost tolerance. It can grow happily as far south as Sydney or thereabouts.

Propagation

Most soils are suitable although it grows best in rich well-composted loamy soil. It thrives in moist humid climates.

The large seed strike easily without the need for any pretreatment. This is literally one of those seed where you just add water, although they can benefit from a soak overnight.

Press the seed about half-way into the surface of a large pot of good quality potting mix put up in say a 200 mm pot. Blackbean are best planted in a community pots - that is, all the seed in together. Just space them a few 5 - 7cm apart. Keep the medium moist but not damp. Place your pot in a warm spot for best germination, a temperature in the early 20°C's is ideal.

Once germination has occurred keep the medium moist, the seedlings will show you. Place in a warm sunny position out of cold wind and frost for best performance. They can grow as an indoor if given a high-light position. They grow quite rapidly but enjoy crowded conditions. Blackbean can make a superb group feature while smallish seedlings.

You will know when to pot on, they will have outgrown the pot!