

## Petalostylis species

*Petalostylis labichoides*, or the Australian Butterfly Bush, is an openly branched shrub to about 1.8m in height by the same in width. Its branches are thin, straight, erect, ascending or spreading, with the spreading stems becoming almost prostrate and almost always touching the soil. Foliage is attractive, the 5cm leaves being lance-shaped and pinnate in an attractive mid-green. The flowers, which are very attractive and give this one its common name (you can see why from the image), are about 2.5cm in diameter in a golden yellow with pronounced red horseshoes appearing from mid-Winter to Summer.

In the wild this shrub inhabits dry to arid territory in New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland and is a hardy, drought tolerant plant that can take dry degraded soils. In many aspects similar to a *Cassia* it can also exist happily in most well-drained soils and wetter areas but is slightly frost sensitive and can only tolerate temperatures to about -6°C. It can be trimmed and pruned as necessary and can make an attractive tubbed specimen and may tolerate cooler climates given shelter from frost. As an inland species it is no stranger to high day-time temperatures and often intense dry cold at night.

### Propagation

Propagation from seed is not complicated the seed requires pretreatment by way of scarification either by steeping overnight in hot (at the outset near boiling) water or by thinning the seed coat by abrasion by rubbing the seeds between fingers and thumb with a medium weight sand-paper.

Propagate in a medium of one part peat moss to three parts river sand. Place the propagating tray or pot in a warm shaded position and cover with clear polythene film until germination occurs. Keep the media moist but not damp during propagation. Prick out the seedlings individually when large enough to handle and grow on until at least 20cm or more and plant out after the danger of frost has passed. Water in well and then as needed, but once established water perhaps once per week.

This species can be pruned and shaped as necessary and this is desirable in coastal regions where it can tend to straggleness if not given some care.

This species is fast-growing and can reach 1.2m in a year if allowed to.