

## Lechenaultia species

Members of the genera *Lechenaultia* are found mainly in Western Australia and are all semi-woody perennials with a low growing or prostrate growth habit. The genus as whole can boast some of the most spectacular flower colours, ranging from the brilliant blue of *L. biloba* to the spectacular scarlet of *L. hirsuta*.

Cuttings from all species, taken at any time of year, strike quite easily and seed has proven to be much more successful since the development of smoke technology and has opened up the possibility of selective hybridisation. All species prefer a well drained, sandy soil and a full sun position although some shade will not adversely affect the plants performance. Plants do not respond well to the addition of fertilisers high in phosphate or nitrates so a slow release fertiliser formulated for Australian native plants would be most suitable.

*Lechenaultia biloba* is frost tolerant down to  $-7^{\circ}\text{C}$  and grows to a height of around 50cm. Leaves are a bluish green in colour, are linear in shape, soft and heath-like. This species is particularly useful in rockeries as it has a tendency to fall over rocks, producing a wonderfully natural effect. It also suckers from time to time which, in this species, is most desirable. Flowers vary in colour from white through the lighter blues to the deep blue that is almost synonymous with the species. During spring, it is not unusual to see *L. biloba* in full flower on road verges through-out the Perth hills with the wonderful blue flowers standing out against the green foliage and wide variety of flower colours offered by other native plants. Select plants when in flower to ensure good flower colour.

Propagation is by way of cuttings taken at any time of year. This species is well suited to rockeries, as a feature plant or in a container using a specific native potting mix. It may also be useful in a hanging basket.

The red *Lechenaultia* is a close relative of the stunning Mirror of Heaven and is a very desirable item itself. A prostrate or semi-erect, low-growing perennial to 30cm in height and 30cm in width it has succulent, crowded, linear leaves to 5-8 mm in length and makes a superb display as a groundcover, preferably in a rockery in perfectly drained sandy soil, or in a hanging basket or tub. The blooms appear in winter and spring and can vary from white to yellow to pink to rose to scarlet or any combination in between although examples grown from this seed source have been a deep red to scarlet.

Although easy to propagate, particularly from cuttings once established, this species is difficult to maintain for long periods and is best grown as a two year plant and then replaced. It is frost tolerant in Australia, which in general terms means to  $-7^{\circ}\text{C}$ , but one of the advantages of this species is that it can be maintained in baskets or tubs and given protection or taken indoors where needed. It can grow in part shade or in full sun.

The Wreath Lechenaultia is a close relative of the stunning Mirror of Heaven and has many of its characteristics to the red Lechenaultia which is a very unusual and hard to get item. A prostrate perennial to 30cm in height and 30cm in width it has linear succulent leaves to 5mm. The large cream and red flowers are beautifully displayed around the outside of the plant and appear in Winter and Spring. It makes a superb and highly unusual display as a groundcover or feature plant, or as a hanging basket specimen of a unique and attractive nature.

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