

Gossypium species – Australian Desert Rose

These flowers last for several days whereas all other local species mentioned only last for one day. *Gossypium australe*, *G. sturtianum* and *G. robinsonii*, with mauve flowers, have also been grown from seed and have flowered in pots from seedlings. They may perform even better if grown from cuttings or grafted.

Susceptibility to frosts has to be considered, although most are hardy plants in areas where only light frosts are experienced. Species such as *Gossypium australe* and *G. sturtianum* are frost resistant while species such as *Hibiscus heterophyllus* and *H. splendens* will need extra protection in frost-prone areas but do grow well in frost prone areas against a wall or fence. Not only is there a range of sizes but members of this family can be found growing in tropical areas - *Abelmoschus manihot*, in swamps and crater lakes - *Hibiscus diversifolius*, along the beach - *H. tiliaceus*, in inland Australia - *Gossypium sturtianum*, *Alyogyne hakeifolia*, in fissures in sandstone in open forest or along rainforest margins - *H. splendens* and along the margins of light rain forests on soils ranging from loam to granitic or poor and gravelly - *H. heterophyllus*.

The Australian Desert Rose is an erect shrub growing to about 5 or 6 feet. It has a slender central stem from which straight side branches ascend giving it an open appearance with mid-green Hibiscus-like foliage and a rose to mid-pink flower with a deep red to maroon centre opening to about 7.5 – 9cm in diameter in the winter and spring.

While this species can take the often intense night cold found in its native desert regions, (they are found extensively throughout northern central Australia) it is not really frost very hardy and is best away from frosty areas. They require a warm well-drained position and can take poor sandy to light loamy soils.

Gossypium australe can be grown and have flowered in pots from seedlings. This species is frost resistant in Australian terms, that is to -7°C.

Propagation

Seed – Sow early spring, in a seedling tray with a mixture of two parts of river sand to one part of potting or propagation mix. Keep moist but not wet. Place in a warm, shady area and water as necessary. Use a large-rosed watering can to avoid seed disturbance. Germination is usually fairly rapid but can be up to four weeks in cooler areas. In colder areas sow where possible in a warm greenhouse.

Prick out the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle. Keep them moist and in a warm sunny place with as much protection from frost and cold as possible until established.

Plant out in a sunny well-drained position after the danger of frost has passed.



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