

Banksia and Dryandra species

Sowing seed: Germination is straightforward. Seed should be placed in a well-drained medium such as sand or sand mixed with perlite or vermiculite. A slightly acid soil with a pH of 6/7 is preferred and autumn and spring are the best seasons for sowing. Seed may be placed either horizontally or vertically with the wing uppermost, lightly covered with soil and kept damp. If the wing of the seed is removed then the apex of the seed can be determined by the irregular edge where the wing has been detached. The base is usually pointed with smooth edges.

Germination times vary from species to species but is generally from 3 to 6 weeks.

In Australia the seed is best sown in autumn or spring. Winter is generally too cold, while in summer the heat tends to keep the soil too dry and the increased watering required tends to promote damping-off. As most bush fires occur in summer causing the tree to shed its seed. Autumn and early winter rains then promote natural germination giving the seedling several months to establish before the summer dryness.

Seedlings: Watch for damping-off at germination and in the first few months. Sprays such as Zineb, Captan, Benlate or Fongarid should control this fungal disease. The seedlings rapidly develop a tap root so they should be potted on within a few weeks of germination. They can be planted out at this stage if desired or potted on and maintained in pots for the first year, but then care must be taken that they do not become root-bound.

Banksias and Dryandras can be maintained in tubs but care has to be taken to avoid root coiling (choose a large deep tub) and they will need careful watering and pruning.

Soils: As most Banksias and Dryandras occur in naturally poor soil they do well in cultivation without fertilisation which may reduce flowering and shorten life.

NOTE that phosphorus is poisonous to Dryandra. If you use fertiliser make sure it is a slow release low phosphate one and use it sparingly. Mulching is of debatable use as it promotes surface roots at the expense of deeper ones which are more desirable. Heavy loam or clay soils can be lightened with coarse sand or gypsum thoroughly worked in. As already stated, a slightly acid soil is best.

Seedlings are best brought on in full sun, preferably in the open air with the pots clustered together to give some shade. Frost tolerance when young can be a problem with the critical temperature being -3°C. If frost is a problem, give protection under wide eaves or against a southern facing wall (north facing in southern hemisphere).

Watering is best done in early morning or late afternoon and care should be taken to water the roots not the foliage. Once established watering should be significantly reduced or ceased to promote root development.

Pruning: Plants with lignotubers - you can heavily prune the upper branches but not the trunk. They have a multitude of dormant buds beneath the bark which respond to fire or pruning.

Plants without lignotubers require more care. Their new growth comes at the nodes on the branches. Pruning is best done only on the branches and then only on branches bearing green

foliage and not below that point. Whole growth intervals should be removed, leaving an appropriate node to shoot.

A lignotuber is a fire tolerant stem and is demonstrated by the production of new growth/stems from the rootstock and by heavy bark up to 1cm thick.



Diagram illustrating a stem with several leaves, showing the correct cutting point above the lignotuber.

