

Schotia brachypetala – Drunk Parrot Tree

Schotia brachypetala, commonly known as the Drunk Parrot Tree or Tree Fuchsia is an attractive tree from Southern Africa where it occurs in warm dry areas in bushveld, deciduous woodland and scrub forest most often on the banks of rivers and streams or on old termite mounds at lower altitudes from Eastern Cape in South Africa north into Mozambique and Zimbabwe. It grows as a single trunked tree that can reach 22m in height in the wild but in cultivation 10 to 15m in height and width is normal.

The bark is rough and brown or grey brown. The leaves are compound, with 4 to 6 pairs of leaflets, each with an entire, wavy margin. The foliage is reddish to coppery when young, turning bright green and maturing to a glossy dark green. The deep red flowers are produced in profusion on the old wood in the Spring. And produce large amounts of nectar which attracts nectar feeding birds. The common name of Drunk Parrot tree comes from the birds gorging themselves on the nectar which can ferment lightly in the blooms and in their gizzard. The fruit is a hard, flattened, woody, dark brown pod containing flattened, pale brown approx. 20 mm diameter seeds with a conspicuous yellow aril.

In warm frost-free areas this tree is evergreen, but in colder regions it is deciduous, losing its leaves for a short period in winter to spring.

Schotia brachypetala grows easily, transplants well and blooms whilst still relatively young. On heavy soils in colder climates it can be quite slow, but in warm, frost-free areas in deep sandy soil with plenty of water in summer, it is surprisingly fast, and has been known to reach a height of 12 m in 17 years. For best results, plant in a warm sunny position, in deep, well-aerated sandy soil, add plenty of well-decomposed compost (humus) and water liberally in summer. It is half-hardy to frost, and young plants require protection, but a well-established tree in a protected spot, should be able to withstand a winter minimum of down to -5°C.

Propagation

Propagation is by seed or truncheon cuttings. *Schotia brachypetala* grows easily from seed, which should be sown in Spring to early Summer, in a well-drained general-purpose potting soil, placed in a warm but shaded spot and kept moist. Soaking the seed overnight in warm (not hot) water assists even germination. Dusting the seed prior to sowing with a fungicide that combats pre-emergence damping off will increase the percentage germination.