

## Crotalaria species

Crotalaria is a large genus of over 500 species; there are about 30 native to Australia and a number of exotic species have become naturalised. They are generally small to medium shrubs or herbaceous species and are known as "Rattlepods" because the seeds are loose in the pods. Some species contain toxins which accumulate in the liver and produce long-term damage which is often fatal.

Crotalaria cunninghamii is a member of the 'pea' family and grows as a shrub to about 3m tall with hairy branches and foliage. The leaves are oval shaped and about 30mm long and the distinctive large, greenish pea flowers occur in Winter and Spring on long spikes at the ends of the branches. The flowers are streaked with fine, black lines. The seed pods that follow flowering are up to 40mm long.

The sap from the leaves of this species were used by aborigines to treat eye infections.

Green bird flower is reasonably popular in cultivation in warm areas. It requires well drained soils and prefers a position in full sun, this species it is not suited to cold climates and is damaged easily by frost.

### Propagation

Crotalaria is easily propagated from seed pre-treated in boiling water. Sow in the Spring and/or at any time after the danger of frost has passed in a good quality seed raising mix.

Although naturally a warm climate species, it will grow in cooler areas but is best grown over the late Spring, Summer and Autumn months.

Prefers a sunny position in well-drained sandy soils with native slow-release fertiliser.

Drought tolerant when established.

Vulnerable to moulds and rotting during winter; however, a Spring pruning and an additional application of native slow-release fertiliser will assist with re-shooting for the warm season and keep its compact shape.