

Dillwynia retorta – Heathy Parrot Pea

Dillwynia retorta commonly known as the Heathy Parrot Pea, is a variable rounded, upright or prostrate shrub that can reach as much as 2m in height although normally less in cultivation. It is found naturally as a heath or dry sclerophyll plant in NSW to southern QLD.

The attractive Pea type flowers are normally bright yellow with a red throat, although orange-yellow flowers are not uncommon. It blooms in the late winter and spring producing masses of flowers in the upper leaf axils. Foliage is narrow, pointed and spirally twisted giving it its botanical name.

Frost hardy to -7°C. As with all the dillwynia family they require good drainage and prefer lighter sandy soils, also responding well to mulching and hard pruning, which promotes bushiness. It is an ornamental nitrogen-fixing understorey plant that can make an attractive low feature or potted plant.

Propagation

Propagation is easy from seed following pre-treatment to break the physical dormancy provided by the impervious seed coat. Pre-treatment can be carried out by abrasion - gently rub the seed between folded sandpaper - or by placing the seed in near boiling water and allowing it to soak overnight as the water cools. The seed retains viability for many years. Cuttings strike well using firm, current season's growth.

Propagation - information for colder climates

Scarify the seed or pre-soak it for 24 hours in warm water. Sow spring in a warm greenhouse at 20°C. When they are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and grow them on in the greenhouse for at least their first winter. Plant them out into their permanent positions in late spring or early summer, after the last expected frosts. Give the plants some protection from the cold for at least its first winter outdoors.