

Metasequoia glyptostroboides – Dawn Redwood

Dawn Redwood is one of the “Dinosaur plants” with fossil records dating back over 20 million years to the dawn of time!

Metasequoia is a genus of one species of deciduous, monoecious, coniferous tree from valley forests of Central China. It had been described from fossils by the Japanese but was believed to have been extinct until a small grove was discovered growing in Central China in during the Second World War. Seed from a small number of trees was originally collected by the Arnold Arboretum of the US in the late 1940's and seed from these trees was made available to arboretum and botanical gardens world-wide forming the original seed-base for trees now in cultivation.

It is a fast-growing tree that can reach 40m at maturity. Cultivated trees have reached 25 to 40m in height and 1 to 1.3m in diameter in under 60 years and has a naturally pyramidal habit. Foliage is flattened needle like leaves 1 to 3.5cm long which are a pale green turning to red in the Autumn. This species is particularly admired for its thick, fibrous, orange-brown bark and a heavy furrowed trunk with a distinctive form and personality.

It can make an excellent feature tree or bonsai subject and with its fast growth it has potential as a forestry species.

This is a cold-hardy tree from a cool climate that can easily take the coldest climates Australia has to offer but it is not well-suited to sub-tropical or tropical climates. It is not fussy as to soil type but does like a well-drained soil with ample water.

As a Bonsai subject it is a vigorous outdoor species best suited to upright styles in either single tree or forest plantings and benefits from regular feeding in Spring and Summer after the new foliage has appeared. Tip prune regularly throughout the year and expect to re-pot every two years.

Propagation

Propagation is straightforward without the need to pre-treat seed although a cold stratification period of one month unifies and hastens germination. Sow lightly (cover seed to only about 3mm) in a good medium potting mix at a temperature in the range of 15 to 20°C, preferably in the higher end of that range. Seeds can be prone to damping off which is best controlled by sterilising growing mixture and maintaining good air circulation once germination has occurred.

Prick individual seedlings out into individual tubes as soon as they are large enough to handle and grow on until at least 15 cm in height. Plant out in their permanent position after the danger of frost has passed.