

Cantua buxifolia – Flower of the Incas

Cantua buxifolia, commonly known as Flower of the Incas is an evergreen shrub that is found naturally in the Andes mountains in Peru and Bolivia where it is the national flower.

This species to some 2.5m in height with erect stems and arching branches. The leaves are small, greyish green and rather fleshy and the flowers are borne in late Spring are long tubular bells to about 8cm in length growing in profusion in bunches on long arching canes. Flower colour is most normally a deep dark red although this can vary through to a vibrant yellow-pink with yellow throats with the one plant sometimes producing flowers in a range of colours. This is a bird-attracting species pollinated by hummingbirds in the Americas and honey eaters in Australia.

Cantua buxifolia is frost sensitive, taking temperatures down to about 1 or 2°C requiring a mild climate without extremes of hot or cold and a sunny open position - in colder areas they prefer a sheltered position against a warm wall. They do best in moist, well-drained, fertile soil.

The shape can be improved by tying back stems and pruning back longer growths however, keep in mind that flowers are borne on the previous season's growth. Give moderate water and a final position that gives protection from hot, drying wind.

Propagation

Propagation is straightforward without the need to pre-treat seed other than soaking overnight in warm water

Sow seed in a good quality well-draining potting mix. Seed should be sown at a depth of about 1cm. Maintain the media in a lightly moist condition. Place sown seed in a warm dry place in light shade.

Prick small seedlings out into individual tubes at about 10cm in height and grow on as desired.

Plant out in a sunny position out of drying winds.