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Strelitzia juncea | Plantz Africa

Strelitzia juncea Link Family: Strelitziaceae Common names: crane flower

Introduction

This is a striking feature plant with upright cylindrical leaves without a leaf blade, growing from 1 to 2 m in height and producing large orange or yellow flowers borne on long, cylindrical scapes from May to October. *Strelitzia juncea* is one of five *Strelitzia* species in southern Africa, namely *S. alba*, *S. nicolai*, *S. reginae* and *S. caudata*.



Description

Description

A perennial herb 1-2 m high, producing thick fleshy roots and upright cylindrical leaves without a leaf blade. *S. juncea* does not multiply by suckering from the base of the stem, but subdivision takes place between the middle leaves of each fan. The species is slow growing and takes 3-4 years to flower. Grown under ideal conditions *S. juncea* is floriferous and long-lived. Although the leaves are very different, flowers resemble those of the more commonly cultivated *S. reginae*. The inflorescence consists of a boat-shaped spathe bearing five flowers on average. The flower spathe is held below the level of the highest leaf tips compared to *S. reginae* where it is held above the leaves.



Conservation Status

Status

According to Raimondo *et al.* (2009) its threat status is Vulnerable. This is due to quarrying, illegal collecting for the horticultural trade, and invasive alien plants.

Distribution and habitat

Distribution description

S. juncea occurs naturally near Uitenhage, Patensie and just north of Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape. These populations of *S. juncea* grow amongst drought-resistant shrubs belonging to genera such as *Euphorbia*, *Cotyledon,* and *Pelargonium,* as well as *Encephalartos horridus,* which indicates that *S. juncea* is able to survive on very little water. Provided it is grown in a well-drained soil, *S. juncea* adapts well to a high rainfall but requires full sun to flower well.



Derivation of name and historical aspects

History

Strelitzia reginae was introduced in England in 1733 and was named after Queen Sophia Charlotte, the wife of George III of England. She was a princess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, hence the genus name *Strelitzia*. The specific name *juncea* is derived from the Latin *juncus* meaning rush a reference to its rush-like appearance.

In the past *S. juncea* was regarded as a variety of *S. parvifolia* or as a variety of *S. reginae* until evidence was produced in 1974 by Dr Van de Venter (Dyer 1975) to confirm the specific status of *S. juncea*. Intermediate forms exist between *S. reginae* and *S. juncea*. After extensive studies Dr Van de Venter came to the conclusion that there are genetic differences between these two species and the intermediate forms could be hybrids between the two species.

Ecology

Ecology

In its natural habitat, *S. juncea* is pollinated mainly by sunbirds and sugarbirds. In areas where these pollinators do not exist, it is necessary to hand-pollinate the flowers, always cross-pollinating to ensure a good seed set. In nature the seed is dispersed by birds. This species can withstand light frost. It has a limited distribution, and known populations produce very little seed, because of unpollinated flowers. Pollinators are rarely seen in habitat.

Uses

Use

As a garden subject *S. juncea* is an ideal accent plant or planted to form a bold group which requires little attention. The flowers are also ideal for cutflowers.

Growing Strelitzia juncea

Grow

A well-drained soil is essential for the successful cultivation of this species, full sun for maximum flowering and applications every winter (May/June) of a generous layer of compost as mulch, which is a form of feeding.



In mid summer (November/December) a mixture that has 1 part superphosphates, 2 parts 3.1.5, and 1 part bone meal can be scattered above the root area and watered. This winter and summer feeding cycle, will help a plant grow faster, and to flower earlier and more prolifically. An ideal potting medium is 2 parts loam, 2 parts sand, 3 parts bark, 3 parts compost, ½ part of bone meal and 1part bounce back.

Propagation is by means of seed and division of the fans which will take a year to re-establish. Best results from seed can be obtained by sowing fresh seed in spring. Before sowing, remove the bright orange tuft of hairs ('aril') attached to the seed. The seed can be soaked in sulphuric acid for five minutes and then washed thoroughly under running tap water for a few minutes. The scarified seeds are then soaked in a solution of ethephon (growth regulator) at a concentration of 2000 ppm active constituent. This entails making up 6 ml ethephon (39.5% active ingredient) to a litre of water. Gibberellic acid (GA3) also has similar results as ethephon at the concentration of 800 mg/dm^3. One of the two growth regulators can be used to soak the seed for 48 hours, then remove from the solution and sow at a depth of 1½ times the size of the seed. A constant temperature of 25 ^{0}C is most suitable for germination. Squirrels, mice and birds are a problem and the seed needs to be protected on the plant from squirrels and, once sown, birds and mice need to be kept out by protecting the seed trays with netting.

Propagation by dividing clumps ensures that clones of the same plants will be obtained. This is best done in autumn or winter. The fleshy roots are difficult to dig up and take time. Dividing into big clumps (60 cm plus in diameter) ensures that plants will recover quicker. It will take about two to three years before they are back to their flowering peak. Transplanting should be complemented by a summer feed, as mentioned above; this can be mixed in the planting hole with a dam above for the first year to catch water.

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Credits

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