

Telopea species

WHEN TO SOW – In warm areas or in a glasshouse at any time. In frost prone areas sow when danger of frost has passed.

WHERE TO SOW – Initially in seedling trays, punnets or small pots. Grow on in pots as desired. Repot when the roots start to emerge from the pot.

SOWING – Sow in a good quality seed raising mix or make your own - use 1:1:1 mix of coir peat, fine vermiculite and fine perlite. Seeds should be planted to a depth equal to their width. These seeds require no pre-treatment although they can benefit from smoke treatment to promote even germination - place 5 – 7cm of dry leaves on the growing medium to be used, set the leaves alight, remove the burnt debris, lightly scuff the soil surface. Or sow the seeds in conjunction with smoked vermiculite. Keep moist. Watering from below is best. Optimum temperature for germination is 20 to 22°C. Germination is assisted by using bottom heat. Germination from 21 to 42 days.

"Damping-off" of seedlings is a common problem with Waratah seedlings. This is a fungal disease which causes rotting of the stems of seedlings, particularly if the environment in which the seedlings are kept is over-wet. The disease can be controlled by providing good airflow around young seedlings and if necessary with an appropriate fungicide such as Mancozeb.

Transplant to individual containers after the emergence of the first true leaves and when large enough to handle. This will normally be at 3 weeks or thereabouts. Use a good quality native potting mix but ensure it has a low phosphorus content. Keep well watered. Fertilise after about 1 month from initial potting on and then as required. The ideal NPK ratio of fertilizers is: N of 15-20%, P of 2-5% and K of 5-10%.

Pot seedlings on as desired and plant out after the danger of frost has passed.

Growing tips

Approximately 70% sunshine and 30% shade either on a daily basis or throughout the day so select a spot which provides the shade requirements under a large Eucalypt or Acacia. Between 250ml and 350ml of natural rain or watering each year. At least 600mm of quickly draining soil beneath the roots. A 135cm diameter concrete pipe 75cm in length is a way to achieve this. Three plants could be put in one pipe. Shelter from the hardest frosts (although plants withstood a -12°C frost in 1994). Some mulch added when the initial planting is done. If using a pipe fill with a mixture of 25% river sand and 75% garden soil. Add in quantity of well-composted mulch. The soil should have neutral pH. The best planting time is the first two weeks of Autumn. Mulch around the newly planted plants with 5cm of mulch. Keep that mulch at least 10cm away from the trunk of each plant. There is a small black beetle which turns up in some gardens that breeds in the mulch and will chew the bark of Waratahs. Prune based on a

three year cycle. When flowers are fully open cut them from the bush. Take two thirds of the new woody growth with the flower (this is easily worked out by the colour changes in the bark). Most of the cut off points will shoot away with new growth (next year's flowers) but about a third won't shoot. These cuts will shoot in the next two years. Feed just at the end of winter when the established flower buds begin to show growing signs and after flowering with half a cup of Yates Camellia food sprinkled on the top mulch around each plant in the drip circle but not close to the roots.

