

Glorious Proteas

When Bold Is Beautiful

You either love them or you don't - Proteas are that straightforward. But the distinctive, (some would say unusual) Protea certainly has its fans, and the club gets bigger every year. This strange but beautiful group of flowering plants includes such Australian favourites as the Grevillea, Banksia and Waratah, as well as the Leucospermum (a pin cushion-like flower), Leucadendron (with smaller flowers at the end of coloured leaf bracts) and the Protea from South Africa. The Proteaceae family's popularity is so great that an export industry has developed to Europe, the United States and Japan for cut flowers but the bulk of fans are Australian and they want to grow their own.

Proteaflores of Monbulk, Victoria supply both international and domestic markets and are one of the best informed on the subject of Proteas. Greenery Magazine spoke to Chris Gilbert Wilson.

"The term Protea confuses most people especially when you start talking about the Waratah, Banksia or Grevillea. They're the Australian branch of the family, and they've always been favourites. Banksias all enjoy a warm well-drained position and will produce bottle-brush type flowers mostly around Winter. Grevilleas also need the warmth and drainage to produce clusters of large spidery flowers either on bush varieties or prostrate ground covering plants. The Waratah, and State emblem of New South Wales, has magnificent bold flowers four inches across. They have the same cultural needs as the Banksias and Grevilleas, but some hybrids such as Shady Lady will tolerate semi shade.

"Protea is the true name of just one of the South African members of the family. These beautiful flowers have many forms and colours, there is a shrub size to suit everyone. The Leucospermum and Leucadendron are cousins of the Protea, and though they have a different appearance, they all want sunshine and soil that water will percolate through."

"If people have difficulty with any of the Proteaceae family it's usually because of poor drainage. They cannot be planted in clay and I often suggest building up a



Protea Pink Ice has a great clear colour which shows up well against its foliage.



The handy Waratah Shady Lady is a deep magnificent crimson.

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