

Plant of the Month

December
2023

Common Name: Imperial Bromeliad
Scientific Name: *Alcantarea imperialis* 'Rubra'
(Carriere) Harms

Family: Bromeliaceae
Genus: Named for Dom Pedro d'Alcantara 2nd emperor of Brazil.

Species Epithet: of the empire, refers to the association above.



Distribution

Rocky slopes of Serra dos Órgãos. A mountain range in Rio de Janeiro state, eastern Brazil.

Native Habitat

They occur on gneiss-granitic inselbergs (*insel* - island, *berg* - rock) at 1300 to 1500 metres. They are strictly rupicolous (grow amongst rocks) and generally lithophytes (grow attached to rocks). They often form large colonies on near vertical cliff faces exposed to sun and wind.

Description

A giant rosette or tank forming bromeliad with large leathery strap like leaves with a smooth margin. Leaves are variable in colour, many forms with a silver plume on the upper leaf surface and red below have been selected for horticulture.

Flowers

Plants take between 8 to 20 years to flower and produce thousands of individual flowers on a large candelabra shaped inflorescence 2-4 metres tall. Individual flowers are white to creamy yellow, with large amount of nectars pollinated by bats.

Fruit

Seed pods can take six months to form and contain filamentous airborne seeds. Plants die after fruiting.

Location in Garden - Lower and Middle Garden

see rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/visit/garden-explorer for locations

Information

Alcantarea imperialis is one of the most striking and dramatic members of the Bromeliad or Pineapple family. Its size, colourful foliage, imposing flowers and ability to grow in full sun have made it very popular in horticulture. Many ornamental varieties including Rubra, Silver Plum and Purple Skotak are cultivated.

They are a key species in the unique ecosystems that grow on Brazil's Atlantic coast inselbergs or islands of rock. Conditions on these rocky outcrops are extreme and monocots such as these and other bromeliads form mat-like plant communities providing habitat for other plants, insects and animal species. The isolation of these outcrops from surrounding vegetation and each other has resulted in high rates of endemism, meaning variation both between and within species on each outcrop.

In cultivation these are hardy plants when grown in free draining soil or planting mix in warm temperate, sub-tropical and tropical areas. They do best in full sun with minimal fertiliser and water. Plants die after flowering (monocarpic) and new plants are best grown from seed.



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