

# *Strelitzia reginae* (orange) *Strelitzia nicolai* (white)

## Bird of Paradise

**Pronunciation:** strel-IT-zee-a REJ-in-ee -or- NIC-o-lay

**Common name:** Bird-of-paradise

**Family:** Strelitziaceae (Crane flower)

Bird of Paradise is a member of the banana family. It's native to South Africa. The flower.

, which resembles a colorful bird in flight, is how it comes to be known by its common name. The plant's scientific name is *Strelitzia reginae* or *nicolai* (orange or white).

The Bird of Paradise has no trunk. The foliage is very similar to small banana leaves with the exception of the long petioles that it produces. The leaves are shiny green and are thick and waxy. This makes the Bird of Paradise an attractive ornamental. Leaves can be as long as 18 inches and up to 6 inches wide. The height of a mature Bird of Paradise is approximately 4 to 5 feet.

### Flower

The flower of the Bird of Paradise is truly unique. The plant consists of a series of modified leaves that are transformed into green, purple and red structures that resemble canoes. The modified leaves reach lengths of 4 to 8 inches. The length of the leaves depends greatly on both the age and the size of the plant.

Each modified leaf, also known as bracts, contain two or more florets. These are either bright orange or yellow with long, slender petals that have a blue tongue. An extension of the tongue that extends well out from the stamen is the female part of the flower.

### Blooms

Bird of Paradise blooms from September to May. If the plant is healthy and well cared for, it may produce up to 36 flower spikes. When cut, they will live as long as two weeks.

### Planting

Dig the hole for Bird of Paradise between two and three times bigger than the root ball. It should be dug the same depth as the height of the root ball and soil should be mounded to cover the sides. This will provide proper drainage for the plant. However, in dry spells, the plant will need to be watered frequently.

### Where to Plant

Bird of Paradise will flower in rich, loam soil that has good drainage. It is a plant that is very salt tolerant, so it is safe to plant it in locations near the ocean. Never plant Bird of Paradise on dunes.

Bird of Paradise should be planted in areas where they will get full sun or partial shade if you want them to produce flowers. If plants are in partial shade, they will grow higher and have larger flowers. Plants are smaller when grown in full sun and the flowers bloom on shorter stems.

### Care

You will not be successful planting Bird of Paradise plants if they don't have adequate moisture, so be sure to

Page 1

*Larry's Orchids & Tropicals, Inc.*

[www.LarrysOrchids.com](http://www.LarrysOrchids.com) • toll free: 855-262-4442

# *Strelitzia reginae* (orange) *Strelitzia nicolai* (white)

## Bird of Paradise

get out your garden hose during the dry months. Water generously during the growing season. This will encourage plants to thrive and will ensure an abundance of blooms.

Use extra soil to create a saucer-like structure around the base of the plant. This will stop water from dispersing before it reaches the roots. Soil that is too wet and doesn't have sufficient drainage, as well as too little water, will cause Bird of Paradise to turn yellow and die. Plants should be watered whenever the soil dries out when they are in the dormant stage.

### Mulch

Place mulch around the plant to stabilize root temperature, conserve moisture and reduce weed growth. Be sure to leave an area free of mulch two to three inches around the base of the plant. If mulch touches the stem, it will cause it to rot.

Use organic mulch for Bird of Paradise for best results. This includes bark, bagasse, leaves, pine needles, sawdust or wood chips. Inorganic mulch such as glass stones, gravel and crushed stone or brick may also be used, if preferred. Never use peat on Bird of Paradise plants. If it dries out, it is difficult to wet and it can stop water from being absorbed into the root of the plant.

### Cold

Bird of Paradise is a tropical plant. However, it can withstand temperatures as low as 24 degrees Fahrenheit for very short periods of time. If temperatures drop to 32 degrees Fahrenheit or lower, buds and flowers will be damaged. Bird of Paradise plants can be grown in cooler climates only if they are taken in before temperatures dip below 32 degrees. If you leave a Bird of Paradise outside overnight in temperatures below that point, it will die.

### Fertilizer

Bird of Paradise plants require slow-release fertilizers. These include blood meal or inorganic 12-4-8. Fertilizers that are slow release should be used fed at the rate of 3 pounds per 100 square feet. 12-4-8 should be fed at one pound per 100 square feet. Fertilize every three months in the growing season. Remove all old flower stalks and dead leaves annually. This will prevent fungal disease that is caused by organisms that build up on the dead leaves and stalks.

### Disease and Insects

Bird of Paradise seldom suffers from disease. They may attract aphids or caterpillars. Spray if either of these appears. Occasionally, leaf borers will attack plants in August and September. Control by spraying weekly. At times snails and scale insects may cause problems. Treat with environmentally pesticide. Never water Bird of Paradise in the evening, or fungal spots will appear on the leaves.

### Seed Propagation

It takes Bird of Paradise plants three to five years to mature from seeds, which are about the same size as a sweet pea seeds and have orange fuzz on the end. Hard seed shells dictate that they must be scratched before they will germinate. The easiest way to do this is to soak them in room temperature water overnight and nick the hard case with a knife or other instrument prior to planting.

# ***Strelitzia reginae* (orange) *Strelitzia nicolai* (white)**

## **Bird of Paradise**

### **Sowing Seeds**

Sow Bird of Paradise seeds in vermiculite to a depth of a half-inch. Do not allow the soil to become dry. Keep it moist, not wet. Cover the seed with a glass container, such as a jar, in order to create a humid environment. It will take Bird of Paradise seeds eight to twelve weeks to germinate.

When seedlings have grown and produced two leaves, transplant into individual containers. You can begin to fertilize the plants at this time.

### **Dividing**

You can also propagate Bird of Paradise plants by dividing them. If you use this method it will take between one and two years for plants to mature and bloom.

- Divide root clumps in late spring.
- Dig up clumps and divide the ones with four or more shoots into single stems.
- Remove dead leaves and roots.
- Wash roots.
- Soak roots in one part bleach and ten parts water for about ten minutes before planting.
- Plant the divisions at the same depth as they were originally planted.
- Division will generate new roots after approximately twelve weeks.

If you give your Bird of Paradise plants a bit of tender loving care, they will produce an abundance of beautiful, bright flowers when they mature. That is when you can sit back and enjoy.