

Bowiea volubilis

Climbing Sea Onion

This most interesting, but not necessarily beautiful, long living bulb (happy in a pot on the windowsill, will live up to 80 years) from the eastern parts of South Africa grows as a green (Granny Smith colored apple) like bulb half buried on the surface of the potting mix. From the top emerges a flower stalk that can reach 6 foot. This flower stalk looks like, asparagus that was not picked for eating, and will have dense, lacy, bright, frothy green branches, which you can allow to hang down or can stake or wire up. With moderate to bright light starry, green flowers will be produced followed by seeds on each flower stalk. After a couple of months the flower stalk dries and fades. After the growth has died back the bulb will go into a period of dormancy but soon start the cycle all over again. The bulb (which can get the size of a softball) itself will also divide and develop into a clump of bulbs. Thrives on neglect, likes root constriction, to be watered sparingly except during the flower stalk growth and is hardy to 50F. Very easy to grow with window light, becoming an heirloom plant past from generation to generation in the family and always unusual and interesting.

Depending on how you purchased your Sea Onion, it may have already arrived potted. Or if it was sold in a kit which included (1) Climbing Sea Onion Bulb (about the size of a gumball to golf ball), planted in a mix similar to cactus mix in a 2.5-inch plastic pot and a label with the Latin and common name. Unwrap the plant carefully as it has begun to sprout. Plant pot in window or under lights but not in direct sunlight. Water and fertilize sparingly and keep the bulb pot bound. Go onto Goggle for lots of detailed culture tips and great pictures of this most interesting plant.

Our bulbs were not collected in the wild but have been tissue cultured in India in order to protect the natural African setting. The bulbs contain cardiac glycosides and the plant is used in native African medicine. Not to be eaten or taken internally.