

ASCLEPIADS

Asclepiads are members of the Milkweed family, from many areas of Africa, through the Middle East into Asia. There are many species but few are seen for sale except from specialist sources. The flowers of many are both unusual and spectacular. Although not true of all of them, they are often called carrion flowers because of the foul smell some produce in order to attract pollinators.



Huernia pillansii

(HINT : keeping the less pleasantly smelling flowers out of direct sunlight reduces the strength of the odour.)

Cultivation / Plantcare

Most come from very arid areas, but many will thrive in cultivation given some heat and care with watering. Damp conditions (either air or compost) must be avoided during cold weather to avoid the rapid onset of rot.

Watering

Regular watering during warm summer weather is beneficial, but the compost must be allowed to dry out between waterings and it must never be allowed to become waterlogged. If the weather turns cold watering should be stopped. Waterings must be reduced in early Autumn and the plants left dry during the winter months.

Tomato type fertiliser should be applied monthly during the summer.

Position

A bright position, with some sunshine is preferred. Too much sun will lead to slow growing, pinkish, sunburnt plants. Too little light results in rapid, lush green growth which is very prone to fungal rot.

Temperature

For safety the minimum winter temperature for most asclepiads should be around 12°C (55°F), however some of the more common species will survive, though not enjoy, temperatures down to about 4°C (40°F).

In summer, they can withstand quite high temperatures, though good ventilation must be provided if temperatures are excessive.



Orbea variegata

Compost

A coarse, very free draining, gritty, peat based compost with added grit is recommended. It is a wise to put some grit in the bottom of the pot for drainage and also to add a layer to the top of the mixture. The latter is decorative and it also helps protect the stems from moisture in the compost.



Acknowledgement

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