

Rothmannia species

Rothmannia globosa – September Bells

This is a hardy, mostly evergreen small tree growing 4 – 7m tall with glossy green leaves and attractive bark that becomes somewhat squared when aged.

A profusion of magnificent white, bell shaped flowers cover the tree from late Winter to Spring, the following fruits are green, round and leathery which are sweet and juicy and become hard and woody when dry.

The juice of the fruits stains a blue colour and is used to heal wounds and burns.

Plant in part shade in well drained soil with added organic matter.

This is a lovely understory species which is fabulous when planted under larger trees that provide some light shade.

Rothmannia manganjae syn Gardenia manganjae – Scented Bells

This is an evergreen tree native to South Africa growing to 12m in height and 4m wide with narrowly elliptic and glossy green leaves with wavy margins. The flowers appear in Spring, put on a spectacular show and have a delightful fragrance, are creamy white, tubular in shape with a splayed opening revealing red spotted petal ends, a yellow throat and a prominent stamen. The spherical fruit that follows flowering is edible, approximately 2 – 4cm and is black when ripe.

Perfect for subtropical or tropical areas but can be grown in temperate regions with some protection from winds – note that this species is frost tender.

Prefers a rich, slightly acidic and well drained soil in full sunlight or some dappled shade, keep moist and a deep layer of mulch.

This is a great garden feature or can be grown as a tall aromatic screen.

Propagation

Mix together equal amounts of perlite and peat moss in a large container, sieve to remove any clumps or debris in the potting media.

Scoop media into 10cm pots and soak in a basin in about 5cm of water, allow to absorb enough water so that it becomes well moistened. Set aside to drain excess water from pots. Plant seeds into the pots and only just cover with the growing media – sprinkle a light layer about 0.3cm over each seed.

Keep seeds moist but not wet and out of direct sunlight and at a temperature not below 23°C. Germination can be erratic, it will begin in 4 – 6 weeks or take as long as 3 months.

Transplant seedlings when they have 2 – 3 sets of leaves – note that most Rothmannia will not tolerate temperatures below 0°C.

Fertilise once a month during the growing season with a Gardenia fertiliser to encourage flowering and prevent root diseases.