

Protea

These very unusual plants can make magnificent specimens and the blooms are unusually spectacular. They can be enjoyed on the plant or make great cut flowers. Many people dry the blooms and use them in 'everlasting arrangements'.

They are almost all from Africa or Australia and this requires a little planning when choosing the right location to plant them. The most desirable spot in the garden is in full sun. Well drained, soil or planting on a slope is essential, with some wind or air movement.

After they are established, they should not be watered more than once a week. Areas that stay wet, like a lawn, are not good. Prepare a large hole, approximately 18" to 30" in diameter and about 16" deep. Mix between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{3}$ fir bark or coarse redwood shavings. Use this mixture to backfill around the root ball of the new plant, being sure the top of the original root ball in the container is the same height or slightly higher than the surrounding soil.

Make a basin about 2" high and about 24" in diameter. Fill the basin twice after planting to allow the water to compact the soil. Water about once a week, being sure to allow it to dry a little between waterings. As the plant grows and matures water over a larger area but less often. Proteas require very little fertilizer. Gro Power used at half strength about every eight weeks is all they need. Avoid high phosphorus fertilizers. Protea like slightly acid soils so a Ph of about 6.5 is most desirable. It is recommended that you do not stake the plants but let them grow naturally. Cut the blooms with long stems and enjoy them indoors. In doing so you are also pruning the plant and it will be bushier. A light application of an iron supplement two times a year will keep leaves a darker green.

If you choose to grow them in containers, we suggest using a well draining potting soil or cactus mix as a potting medium. Container grown plants will also do a little better in partial shade as they dry out faster.