

GLOXINIA

In flower language, the gloxinia signifies admiration. Native tribes of Brazil use this flower to honour the beauty of their women and their gods. The gift of one of these plants is a token of admiration and friendship. The name Gloxinia is commonly used to describe the sinningia genus (this name comes from Wilhelm Sinning, head gardener at Bonn University in the 19th century). Gloxinias grow to between 24 cm (10") and 26 cm (11") in height and their bloom are characterized by their richly varied colouring, ranging through the various shades from blue to purple and from pink to crimson and white. Their foliage has a soft velvety texture.

Light And Water

While the plants are flowering they should be in the light, away from direct sunlight, with regular but not excessive watering. Do not let the leaves get wet, as they are very delicate.

Fertilizer

Use a balanced fertilizer such as 20-20-20. Do not, however, use the strength recommended on the label but, dilute to about 1/3 or less the recommended strength. This avoids root burn. Fertilize only strongly growing and/or blooming plants, about once every ten days and wet the soil thoroughly with plain water before pouring on your fertilizer. If you want to induce flowering, use a high phosphate, potash fertilizer (i.e. high last number on the formula). When bloom ceases, return to normal formula.

Maintenance

When flowering has stopped and the leaves begin to look "sad" remove all growth stems and leaves by twisting the plant off the tuber. Allow the pot to dry out thoroughly and leave for at least six weeks, in a dark spot. After this period bring the pot back into the light and start watering sparingly. A little heat under the pot does wonders. Repotting only needs to be done after about four or five flowerings.

Starting Tubers

Gloxinias grow from a tuber, which may be brought back into growth time and time again. Plant in a 5" or 6" pot in a very light soil mixture, preferably 1/3 good potting soil and 2/3 peat. Place tubers, concave side up, a few inches apart and cover them with about half an inch of starting medium. Since the roots grow from top surface of the tubers as well as from the bottom, exposing the top will lead to a poorly developed or tardy root system. Room temperature is fine, but avoid higher temperatures. In a greenhouse, bottom heat should be provided until growth is well under way. Keep the medium uniformly moist but not soggy. If in doubt about watering, keep the soil a little on the dry side until there are visible signs of growth, usually within two weeks at which

time watering may be increased slightly. Keep gloxinias in a sunny window. The plants need direct sun, not north light or filtered light. Unless the young sprouts can bathe in direct sunlight at least briefly each day, the plants will get a soft, instead of a sturdy, start in life. Allow only one shoot to develop from each stem. If multiple shoots appear from a single tuber, snip off all except one. Do not pour water directly over the crown of the tubers, especially where sprouts have been removed, and avoid wetting the leaves or stems.