

Furcraea Growing Guide

Growing *Furcraea Longaeva*

Except when in flower this plant appears very similar in appearance to *Beschorneria yuccoides*. It is however not as hardy and has one extraordinary characteristic.

Those of you who visited Chelsea in 2017 may well have seen an enormous flowering spike on the Burncoose stand of this plant which flowered in our show tunnel in a large container after 15 or 20 years. With great difficulty we managed to transport the 12ft tall flowering spike in a lorry to Chelsea. There it grew to such an extent that we had to cut it in half to get it back on the lorry. After a fortnight the spike had become branched with pendulous greenish outer petals on white individual flowers. There were thousands of them and many remained on the half stem well into August.

We know that the effort of producing this massive flower will mean that the plant will then die. However there will be offsets left at the base of the dead plant and the profusion of seeds will germinate readily in the sort of warm and relatively frost free environment which we have in our show tunnel.

On the south coast of the UK others have produced similar inflorescences of 20 or even 30ft which have drawn the attention of journalists. This is however not a common occurrence nor is it predictable at a particular age. A series of warm summers and mild winters are probably what persuades this extraordinary plant to perform.

We should certainly have plenty of small seedlings soon!

If you grow this plant in the greenhouse treat it like a cactus or succulent and apply a nitrogen fertiliser once a month. Dry the plant off in winter to avoid rotting.

It may be half a lifetime before we all see another inflorescence like this although Ventnor Botanic Gardens usually manages a few from a large clump each year.



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