BURNCOOSE NURSERIES PART OF THE CAERHAYS ESTATE

Polylepsis australis - Growing Guide

Growing Polylepsis Australis

This is a rare and unusual large woody deciduous or semi-evergreen shrub from the Andes which we have only occasionally offered on our website. While we have found it fairly easy to propagate from softwood new growth cuttings the plants growing at Caerhays seem to die off for no reason while actually in flower just as they have started to look good in some maturity. It may be that since Polylepsis australis comes from much harsher climates than Cornwall it needs colder winters to prosper? However Hillier's report the same problem in their Hampshire arboretum.

The largest plant at Caerhays grew once to around 5ft in height with a near similar spread. Large enough for its very attractive pale brown flaking bark to become a noticeable feature on the drive here. The flowers do not exactly stand out but are also attractive and unusual in their own way. They are borne in long drooping racemes in May and the individual flowers are green with reddish-purple stamens. The seed has set here but it has shed or been eaten by young pheasants before we could collect it.

The leaves are pinnate with five or seven toothed short stalked leaflets and are congested at the end of the twigs or shoots. Once you have seen this plant in maturity with bark and leaves together it is so unusual that you are unlikely to forget it. In autumn many of the leaves lower down the stem turn an attractive yellow while some stay green.

The largest plant of P. australis that I have seen travelling around UK gardens was at Windsor Great Park where it was 12ft or more tall with a trunk 3 or 4in (at least) across.

We are now self-propagating from young plants in the nursery to try to build up larger stocks of this worthwhile but unusual shrub.



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