BURNCOOSE NURSERIES PART OF THE CAERHAYS ESTATE

Desfontainia - Growing Guide

Growing Desfontainia Spinosa

Commonly known as ‘Chilean Holly’

This is a peculiar, evergreen, and much admired, holly-like shrub which is much sought after by those who have seen its spectacular red tubular flowers which are tipped with yellow and hang down against the glossy green and spiny leaves.

Although Chilean, this plant has thrived in all parts of the UK (including Scotland) since it was first introduced by William Lobb in 1843. Some mature plants may eventually get to 10ft in height but, in the nursery, our erect growing stockplant is about 5ft tall after 20 or so years. At Caerhays the plant lived for about 30 years in poor soil conditions only achieving a similar height. It may well be that this plant flowers more profusely and has a consequently shorter lifespan when grown in less than ideal conditions.

The reference books recommend growing in peaty, lime free soil in cool dappled shade. We would not entirely agree. Certainly this plant needs shelter from strong winds but it flowers better in sun than in shade.

The flowers appear singly over quite a period of time between July and September. They are positioned at the top of the new growth stems and hang down about 1½in long. Some forms have more orange rather than red flowers and the yellow tips can also vary in length or be more orange in some forms we have seen.

This is an easy and rewarding plant to grow in a shrub border or in woodland setting. Even as a feature plant in a herbaceous border.

Cuttings should be taken as semi ripe new growth in mid summer and set with bottom heat.

Desfontainea spinosa

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View this video on Youtube here https://www.youtube.com/XpEuSnx24bY?si=zifmGUgRTstmuvHp

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