

Embothrium - Growing Guide

Background

Embothriums were first discovered in Chile by William Lobb in 1846 and were first flowered in the UK at the Veitch nursery near Exeter in 1853. They are evergreen trees in the wild which grow in the open, often as suckering thickets, and can achieve a height of 20-30ft. Some forms can lose their leaves in a cold or windy winter with no ill effect, but most are evergreens. Seed collected in the 1920s from the Andes in Argentina produced plants which, coming from high altitudes where it is drier, have produced hardier plants. It can therefore be argued that *E. coccineum* from Chile, with more rounded leaves and orange-scarlet flowers, is more likely to be tender outside the West Country. *E. lanceolatum*, with more elongated leaves and orange-scarlet flowers, from the Andes is likely to be hardier in most of the UK. Embothriums can be grown in conservatories but this is generally unnecessary.

Perhaps no tree in cultivation gives quite such a striking and brilliant display of colour over such a long period in April to June. The huge and numerous flower clusters are designed to attract humming birds and insects in the wild to achieve pollination.

Positioning

We have found, after many experiments and failures, that embothriums perform best in full sun in hot but wind sheltered locations. They need lime free (ie acidic) soil which is well drained and not prone to waterlogging as well as being not too heavy. That does not mean that the soil should not remain moist and it is not a bad idea to lay slate slabs around and over the roots of younger plants in very dry locations until the plants get established.

The addition of fertiliser (dung or granular feed) anywhere near the plant will almost always cause it to die. This is why we grow these plants in the nursery in a mixture of soil and peat without any slow release fertiliser in the compost.

Customers laugh when we recommend planting three of these expensive plants out in the garden at the same time rather than just one. However, embothriums are notorious for 'turning up their toes' quickly if they dislike their location. Once they have achieved a couple of seasons' new growth they will however romp away and grow very quickly indeed. In the correct position they should begin to flower in the third year after planting.

To give you an idea of just how temperamental these plants can be we find that when we pot them on, or even move them to a new location in the nursery, part of each batch often dies in protest.

So there is an element of careful planning and more than a little luck in selecting a suitable location for these difficult to establish plants. When we last planted three out in the Burncoose garden the one which went away best was in very poor stony soil in a location where its survival was doubtful. The one in the best location of course died immediately!

In Cornwall, the longevity of embothriums, which grow exponentially and exhaust themselves overseeding, is 30 to 50 years.



Embothrium coccineum



Embothrium coccineum



Embothrium nargunco



Embothrium norquince



Embothrium norquince



Embothrium norquince



Embothrium norquince



Embothrium norquince

Embothriums are very difficult to root from cuttings and we have given up the effort in the nursery. If your plant does produce suckers from where its roots rise above the soil these can be gently cut away and transplanted before the sap rises in the spring. However relatively few plants growing here do have suckering growth on offer.

The easiest and main way of propagating embothriums is from seed. The numerous seed pods ripen quickly after a hot summer to reveal numerous tiny winged seeds. They can be ready for collection in late October.

Store the seeds in dry, frost free unheated conditions over winter and sow them in the early spring in a tray of sieved topsoil with a little peat or leaf mould mixed in.

The seeds will germinate quickly but they are initially so tiny that it may be best not to prick them out for potting on until late summer or even leave them until the following spring in their seed box before moving them on.

The young seedlings and young plants, with soft new growth, can easily get scorched in strong direct sunlight so make sure you have adequate shading in place in the greenhouse.

We have full and [detailed article on collecting, storing and planting seeds](#) .

Embothrium Seed Collection And Storage

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/hplC5z8Bpoc>

Propagation Of Embothrium - Video Tip

Propagation issues with Embothrium

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/AJqjuj2hpIE>

Pricking out seedlings

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