



## Further information

For more details on this fascinating range of plants check out the following.

### Websites:-

[www.trevenacross.co.uk](http://www.trevenacross.co.uk)

[www.exoticplants.co.uk](http://www.exoticplants.co.uk)

[www.rbgekew.org.uk/ksheets/proteas.html](http://www.rbgekew.org.uk/ksheets/proteas.html)

### Books:-

**The Protea Book** - A guide to cultivated Proteaceae. Lewis J Matthews.

ISBN 0-88192-553-5

**Proteas A field guide to the Proteas of Southern Africa.** Tony Rebelo.

ISBN 1 874950 02 4

**Gardening on the edge -**

Drawing on the Cornwall experience.

Contains a very useful

Chapter on all the Proteas.

ISBN 0 906720 33 8

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# Protea

## Cultural notes

A guide to growing this diverse range of plants including Banksias, Hakeas, Grevilleas and other members of the Proteaceae family



*Leucadendron Sunset*

*Banksia spinulosa collina*



*Protea Pink Ice*



*Embothrium*



*Grevillea*

## General background

Proteas have been grown in this country from as early as the 1780s, when only the well-to-do collected them. Growing them in large flue heated conservatories which created a dry environment, well suited to the growing of proteas.

It wasn't until the end of the nineteenth century when, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, saw the introduction of steam heating, which created a more humid atmosphere, that the popularity for collecting Proteas began to wane.

At present with so many people taking holidays in South Africa now that Apartheid has ended, the enthusiasm to 'grow something from South Africa' has resulted in many visitors to that country bringing home a packet of Protea seeds, then seeking advice on how to grow them successfully.

## Raising from seed

First sow the seeds thinly in trays or pots in Spring or early Autumn, in a mixture of 50% moss peat and 50% horticultural perlite, then cover them with a fine layer of perlite. Place the trays on a unheated bench in a cold greenhouse. Place pieces of glass over the trays or pots to retain moisture, then shade the glass with pieces of newspaper. This method will incur a temperature rise in the seed tray to between 75° F. to 80°F. by day. At night TAKE OFF the covers so that the temperature of the compost reduces to below 50 degrees F. This temperature difference is essential for good germination.

When the seedlings are large enough, prick them out carefully into 5cm deep tapered plug trays or 7cm pots may be used using a similar open mix as used for seed sowing. Although growth will be slow depending on the time of year, on no account should they be fed with any fertilizers until well established.

## Pot Cultivation

Proteas make excellent tub and patio plants when sited in an open sunny position in terracotta pots with good drainage holes. The use of pot feet is recommended.

Add at least 2-3" of crocks or small pieces of polystyrene to the bottom of the pot for extra drainage. We sell our own ready made Protea compost but you can mix your own by following these instructions. Make up an extremely well drained acidic compost mixture using some of the following: peat, composted bark, perlite, small and large grit, composted pine needles, polystyrene beads and vermiculite. Note it is not critical to have all these ingredients - the key is to make sure that the mix is very free draining. Here we also use 10% sterilised soil in the mixes.

Proteas dislike stagnant humid conditions. Always grow them on a site with good air circulation even if over wintering them in greenhouses. Give them plenty of ventilation and keep them on the dryer side during the winter. When grown in containers let the top 2" of compost dry out before re watering.

Water the compost only, not the plant, this keeps the foliage dry. In hot weather water in the mornings and evenings only. One common misconception is that Proteas in pots do not need much watering. In their natural habitat they send out roots looking for moisture. In a pot they are relying on you to provide them with the necessary moisture.

## Feeding

The very fine Protea roots have the unique ability to absorb any nutrients from very poor soils. They are very delicate and are generally found close to the surface, therefore avoid surface cultivations. It would be better to mulch with bark or pine needles.

This leads on to the often asked question of what to feed them? We recommend using the Trevena Cross Protea fertiliser, we have had this especially blended to provide exactly what the plants need. This is either available in slow release form or as a liquid feed. A

combination of both feeds will give the best long term results. Do not feed with fertilizers containing phosphates.

## Pruning

Some Proteas, notably the King Protea produce a lignotuber. These can be cut back to the ground and will regrow, however most Proteas are best only pruned to remove damaged, or diseased stems or to control the shape of the plant.

## General cultivation

In mild areas of this country many varieties may be grown outside as long as the soil is extremely free draining, acidic and very low in nutrients. A good example would be a south facing steep slope in full sun in an open position. Planting on a raised mound and adding bark and grit for drainage would make a useful substitute for a steep slope. Proteas will not put up with wet feet for long periods.

All Proteas should be protected from frost for at least the first two years. Once established, many Proteas, Leucadendrons, Hakeas, banksias and Grevilleas will stand a fair degree of frost. Some can survive minus 5 degrees C. to minus 10 degrees C. Protect with horticultural fleece or overwinter pot grown plants in a greenhouse when hard frosts are forecast.

Hopefully these growing tips will enable you to grow what must be among the most exotic flowering shrubs available and offer you an exciting challenge.

Further sources of information are listed overleaf along with a few pictures of some various Proteaceae.