Description

This is the original "lobster claw" heliconia. Why the 'original' is called 'claw 2' is anyone's guess. (There is a claw 1 and a claw 3 – someone doesn't have much imagination).

A prolific bloomer in summer and throughout the year in warmer areas, lobster claw 2 makes a good cut flower.

Bracts are a bright orange-red color with green tips and a thin white lip. It can grow in partial shade to full sun, and gets to about 8 to 10 feet tall.

Although happiest in tropical and sub-tropical areas, Heliconia bihai (Claw 2) should be root hardy even down to Zones 8 and 9 (which includes all but the very coldest areas of Australia) if the rhizome is protected from freezing. This may just require a heavy layer of mulch during winter, or it may require the rhizome to be dug up and kept in a pot in a warmer area.

Cultivation

Heliconias are adapted to full or part sun. Height will tend to increase if the plant is subjected to shade.

Their requirements are simple: fertile well drained soil, warm humid temperatures and adequate water. They do not like frosts.

All of the eastern coast of Queensland, northern stretches of New South Wales, and most areas of humid Northern Territory and Western Australia are perfect for heliconia growing – the only requirements is selection of the right cultivars.

Heavy mulching is recommended to protect the soil from drying out, and to enhance the soil organic matter. In areas where rainfall in low, additional irrigation is important.

Fertilisers used by home gardeners are generally chicken pellets, although complete fertilizer blends are ideal. The only significant pests for gardeners are grasshoppers, scale and mealybugs. Diseases are rare but wet feet, especially in winter, can rot the root system.

The 'stem' is actually made up of rolled leaf bases and the flowers emerge from the top of these pseudostems. Pruning is therefore not advised. Each pseudostem will only flower once, so after flowering it is best to cut that pseudostem out.

Planting instructions

Please plant as soon as possible after you receive the rhizome.

The rhizome should still have growing 'buds' or new shoots as well as the leaf stem.

The rhizome should be planted with the top (leaf stem/new shoots/buds pointing upwards) no more than 3-4 cm under the soil. New shoots or larger buds should be above the soil. You can often look at the rhizome and see where the soil line had been while it was growing.

It is very important not to plant the rhizome too deep, as this will invite fungi and cause root rot. Freshly planted rhizomes need oxygen to grow new roots and will die if the planting medium is too dense or too wet.

After planting, water thoroughly, then do not water again until soil is getting dry. Keep evenly moist, but not wet, when shoots to grow and leaves start to unfold.

If planted in pots, these should be of sufficient size - at least 10 to 15 cm wider than rhizome size. Keep the pots in a warm, sunny place. When leaves start to unfold the plants can be planted out - again in well drained soil.

A slow release fertilizer is ideal in the beginning. Larger and already established plants require more fertilizing and more water.