**Heliconia psittacorum 'Petra'**

**Description**

'Petra' is a vigorous plant and prolific bloomer, about 3-6 feet tall. It will grow in 50% shade to full sun. Bracts are light red with a frosty waxy coating, becoming orange toward the rachis. The true flowers are bright orange with a dark green tip. Petra is similar to 'Andromeda', but Petra is a larger plant with larger flowers.

**At a glance:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suitable for Zones:</th>
<th>9-12 (see the Zone Hardiness map page in my eBay store) – root hardy down to Zone 8 if rhizome is protected from freezing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun requirements:</td>
<td>Full Sun to part shade (up to 50% shade)</td>
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<td>Flowering times:</td>
<td>Spring/Summer, almost year round in warmer areas.</td>
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<td>Moisture requirements:</td>
<td>Moderate to high</td>
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<td>Size when fully grown:</td>
<td>3 - 6 feet- will grow taller in the shade</td>
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<td>Reasonably frost tolerant</td>
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**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 is 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.