

Plant of the Month

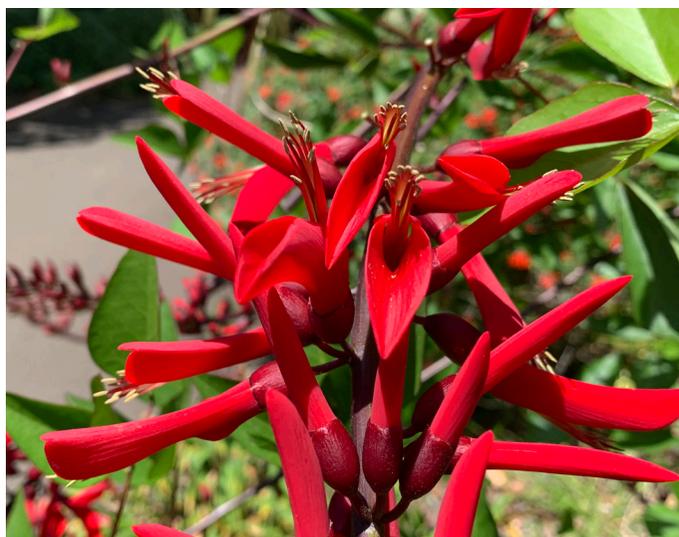
November
2020

Common Name: Blake's Erythrina
Scientific Name: *Erythrina x bidwillii* 'Blakei'
Lindl.

Family: Fabaceae

Etymology

Genus: *Erythrina* – from the Greek word "erythros", meaning red. Refers to the flower colour of many species.



Distribution

Horticultural origin. Bred at Camden Park Estate in the 1840s. Parent species are: *Erythrina herbaceae* (Coral Bean) from southeastern USA and northeastern Mexico and *Erythrina crista-galli* (Cockspur Coral Tree) from South America.

Native Habitat

Both parent species grow in open forests on sandy soil often by creeks, swamps and wetlands.

Description

A spiny, semi-herbaceous shrub which produces arching stems in the spring from a squat trunk. New canes are soft and light purple with leaves composed of three leaflets.

Flowers

Vermillion red in both bud and flower. Calyx a darker red. Large standard petal, sits below ten stamens. Flowers are rich in nectar and visited by birds and insects.

Propagation

Plants need to be grafted onto rootstock. Our plants are grafted onto *Erythrina crista-galli* rootstock.

Location in Garden

Bed 18b in the Middle Garden.

Information

Bred by William Macarthur at the family's Camden Park Estate in the 1840s. William Macarthur was a pioneering horticulturist and viticulturist, who created the first Australian bred Camellia, *Camellia* 'Aspasia Macarthur'.

Blake's Erythrina was the first hybrid between two woody legumes anywhere in the world. This is one of two hybrids developed from the same parents and the first Australian hybrids described in Europe. The other hybrid called *Erythrina x bidwillii* 'Camdenii' can also be found in our Garden.

The name commemorates an early director of our Garden, John Carne Bidwill (1847-48), also a prodigious plant breeder. The name also honours ex-convict Edmund Blake who was a gardener at Camden Park. Edmund Blake was convicted of destroying plants in Norfolk in 1834 and sentenced to 7 years jail in NSW. He was transported on the Bengal Merchant in 1835. He worked at Camden Park from 1837 to at least 1867 and two other hybrids were named in his honour, *Passiflora* 'Blakei' and *Gladiolus* 'Blakei'.



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