

Plant of the Month

July
2021

Name: *Doryanthes excelsa* Correa
Language Name: G/y/omea Dharawal language
Common Name: Gymea Lily
Family: Doryanthaceae
Genus: Composite of two Greek words, *doratos*, meaning spear, and *anthos* meaning flower
Species epithet: From the Latin, *excelsus*, meaning high or lofty



Distribution

Central Coast and North Coast of NSW, including the Sydney Basin. It is distributed discontinuously from near Wollongong in the south to the hinterland of Coffs Harbour in the north, there is a large gap between southern and northern occurrences.

Native Habitat

Grows in dry sclerophyll forest and woodland on sandstone and partly clay soils.

Description

Giant rosette of large sword-shaped leaves 1 to 2.5 metres long and 10 cm wide. Leaves are bright green, fibrous and glabrous. Old plants form very large clumps up to 3 metres tall and wide.

Flowers and Fruit

Flower scapes or spikes emerge in winter from the centre of the rosette and grow to 6 metres tall. The scape bears small leaves up to 30cm long. Red trumpet shaped flowers up to 10 cm across occur in a terminal clump 30cm in diameter at the end of the scape. Flowers are surrounded by reddish-brown bracts. Flowering is followed by brown capsules 7-10 cm long that split to release seeds 15-23 mm long.

Location in Garden

Australian Rockery and Solander Garden .
Use our new Garden Explorer plant finder at:
<https://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/Visit/Garden-Explorer>

Information

This is one of only two species in the genus and family, both are endemic to Australia. The other species, *Doryanthes palmeri* occurs in northern NSW and southern Queensland.

The large, red nectar rich flowers are a magnet for bird species and are visited by Cockatoos, Rainbow Lorikeets, Currawongs, Honey-eaters and smaller birds including Noisy Miners. This is one of the few plants in the world that has green pollen.

Plants grow from a swollen underground stem which is pulled deeper and deeper into the ground by contractile roots.

Aboriginal cultural groups ate roasted young stems. Fleshy roots can also be roasted and eaten.

This is an extremely hardy and robust plant with few pests. It is widely used as a landscaping plant and flowers are highly prized by the floricultural industry in Australia and increasingly overseas.

Plants can be propagated by dividing established plants. Seed germinates readily within two months and is best sown in autumn. Plants grown from seed usually take 8 years to flower.

  
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