

Darlingtonia Californica

The Cobra Lily



Darlingtonia californica—showing pitcher and “tongue”

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The Cobra Lily is native to the west coast of North America and occurs in two states—California and Oregon. It grows in seepage bogs from sea level to several hundred metres altitude. The plants experience virtually constant water moving through their habitat plus the cooling effect of the sea and the altitude. For these reasons the plant does not tolerate very hot conditions.

A cool root run may be an aid to successful cultivation of this species though this seems to be only necessary when the weather is hot constantly, day and night. It has to be said that weather conditions of this sort rarely last more than a couple of weeks and many growers are able to grow *Darlingtonia* without resorting to any special techniques. However for those growers who do experience a problem two differing growing techniques are given here; both appear to give consistently good results.

Plants may be grown in baskets – the type used for aquatic water-lilies. Plants grown in baskets need to be watered by the tray system, with the baskets standing in several centimetres of water. Fresh rain or distilled water should be flushed through the compost daily in hot weather. In areas with temperatures higher than in the UK, this cooling can be further achieved by adding ice cubes on the surface of the peat and allowing them to melt. A flood and flow hydroponic-based system, developed by the CPS as an alternative method to peat by adapting commercially available flood and drain (ebb and flow) systems, can also

be used successfully for *Darlingtonia*, and other genera, and lends itself well to chilling the water (see “Growing without Peat” Care Sheet).

Alternatively plants may be grown in a compost comprising equal parts by volume sphagnum peat and perlite. Coir may be a potential alternative or part substitute to peat for *Darlingtonia*, and has been used successfully by some growers (see “Growing without Peat” Care Sheet). Plants grown this way will still need to be watered by the tray system and can be flushed with cool water in hot weather for best results. As a further means of keeping the roots cool, plants can be grown in terracotta pots to encourage cooling of the roots through evaporation. Growing your plants in white coloured pots also works well.

Plants do well in a standard compost comprising of peat, perlite and possibly grit or sand. The addition of about 15% coarse orchid bark has been shown to be very beneficial.

These plants do well in strong sunlight and once they reach a certain critical size they will produce runners which will eventually make new plants. Propagation from the runners is by far the best and quickest method. Seed can be sown as well but it tends to be quite slow to reach maturity.



Darlingtonia group shot