

Growing Bougainvillea

In 1768 when Admiral Louis de Bougainvillea began his long journey to the Pacific Ocean and discovered the vine that now bears his name, it was a botanical highlight of the voyage. Through the ensuing years, this Brazilian beauty has assumed its rightful place as one of the most popular, spectacular and beautiful tropical plants. The modern day hybrids of *Bougainvillea spectabilis* (*B. Brasiliensis*) and *B. glabra* are among the most beautiful of flowering vines. The vibrant color of this vine comes not from the small white tubular flowers, but from the 3 large paper-like bracts that surround each flower much like the poinsettia.

CULTURE

Bougainvillea can be grown in the Bay Area however, because they are semi-tropical there are some guidelines prospective bougainvillea buyers should be aware of:

Where frost is expected vines should be given a protected, warm wall or the warmest spot in the garden. If you can get your bougainvillea through the first couple of winters it will become established and more able to take some frost damage and still recover.

Bougainvillea roots don't knit the soil together into a firm rootball in the container and are highly sensitive to disturbances. Transplanting, rough handling or knocking the rootball around can fatally injure the plant. To minimize disturbance when planting, cut out the bottom of the container and slit the sides from an inch below the top of the can to the bottom. After you have planted the vine, carefully pull the container up and out of the soil then water your bougainvillea in, with confidence.

Supply sturdy support such as a trellis, stake or arbor and keep long shoots tied up so they won't whip in the wind or shred leaves against the sharp thorns along the stems. Protect from high winds.



FERTILIZATION

These vines are heavy feeders and respond best to almost constant feeding with ½ strength water soluble fertilizer, e.g. **MasterNursery Bud & Bloom 10-52-8**, or **Miracle-Gro**. If you prefer a granular fertilizer **MasterNursery Rose & Flower 5-10-5** would be a good choice. With plentiful sunlight and constant feeding, these plants will bloom almost 10 months of the year.

WATERING

These plants flower best under stress. Keep the plant slightly on the dry side, and allow the plant to become root bound.

INSECTS

Bougainvilleas are almost totally insect free. The occasional aphid can be hosed off with water.

POPULAR VARIETIES

Some varieties of Bougainvillea are more well known and/or frost hardy than others, a few of these are:

'Barbara Karst' sports vigorous growth and a quick come back from frost damage. This vine blooms young and for a long period with showy bracts that are bright red, in the sun, or bluish crimson, in the shade.

'San Diego Red' wins as one of the best vines on all counts. Large, deep green leaves, that hold well in cold winters, lead to deep red bracts over a long blooming season. The vigorous, high climbing vine can be trained into a tree form with staking and pruning.

'Hawaii', better known as **'Raspberry Ice'**, is one of the hardiest varieties despite its tropical appellation. This is no vine at all, but a shrublet with a spreading, mounding habit. The golden-yellow, variegated foliage contrasts with the bright red bracts. This variety is well suited for hanging baskets, containers and small-scale ground covering.

OTHERS TO LOOK FOR:

'California Gold' Golden yellow-orange bracts.

'Tahitian Dawn' An amazing show of colorful flowers which open golden and turn to rosy-mauve.

'Jamaica White' White, veined with green, bloom young, vigorous.

'Texas Dawn' Smaller pink flowers, in huge clusters, vigorous, keep cut back.

'Rosenka' This is one of the most free flowering varieties—also extremely dwarf and will never cover a trellis or arbor. It's a "shrub" more than a vine.

The **'Bambino'** Series, bred in Australia, all are very compact growers and perfect for smaller gardens and even patios.

GROWING IN CONTAINERS

Plants do best in large (5-10 gallon) clay containers if grown outdoors (clay containers tend to stay drier, thus stressing the plants) or in large hanging baskets. The 10" basket is the commercial standard, but plants will do much better in 12" hanging baskets. Place the containers in full sun, or in a place where they will receive at least ½ day of full sun. If your bougainvillea is not blooming, it probably is not receiving enough sun or fertilizer. These plants thrive in the tropics in areas of low rainfall and intense sun and heat. Any well drained potting soil mix is suitable for growing Bougainvillea, we recommend **MasterNursery Potting Mix**. To each "5 gallon size" pot add ¼ cup of Osmocote slow release fertilizer. For 10-12" hanging baskets use 2 tablespoons.