

Waratahs – a few facts

I have been unable to grow a Waratah (*Telopea speciosissima*) both in the ground and in pots, let alone get one to flower. However, I have not given up hope and this has led me to read a great book titled 'The Waratah', by Paul Nixon that was printed by Kangaroo Press in 1997. It is full of valuable information on how to successfully grow them and get them to flower. The following are a few facts from the book (in no particular order), that I found interesting:

- The best soils to grow them is deep, free draining and with a North, North East or North West aspect to ensure maximum sun.
- They usually grow one to 3 metres high and if in deep fertile soil free of competition, they will grow to five metres.
- They normally flower at the spring equinox.
- Once flowering has started to open, the bushes should be well watered as stress at this time will cause added bract burn.
- They are frost hardy to -12 C°.
- The primary cultivation requirement is similar to the requirements of citrus, namely a well drained site.
- When planting one sure method of achieving positive drainage is to place the plant on the ground or above ground surface – do not dig a hole but mound up around the plant to form a bed.
- They respond to very high levels of nutrition – especially Blood and Bone and farm animal manures (not fresh poultry manure).
- The ideal NPK ratio of fertilizers are: N of 15-20%, P of 2-5% and K of 5-10%.
- Apply fertilizer to correspond with leave growth – Spring and Autumn.
- Pests – too many to list, but the main pest is the borer that attacks the ripening bud. Lookout for sawdust at the base of the bud for sign of activity. Use carbaryl or Endosulphon (although I am sure Confidor will work JH).
- Pruning juvenile Waratahs is desirable to make plant divide and encourage basal growth.
- On page 43 there is an excellent model “ ... that works” For growing from seed to flower.
- In the wild, they flower best after bush fires as they are free from root competition for a few years at least. Lack of root competition in the home garden is recommended.
- Flower buds develop early in the year, so it is bud for 7 to 8 months.
- Vase life of flowers is 10 to 14 days. To get an extra week pour a cup of water over the flower each day.
- You can expect 500 flowers to a plant in ideal conditions, although 250 blooms is a more realistic total.
- Fresh seed germinates readily. The seed deteriorates fairly rapidly unless stored at low temperature and low humidity and not in a plastic bag.

