



Bougainvillea

At a Glance

Light: very bright light; filtered shade or full sun

Water: keep on the dry side; roots do well when allowed to become somewhat root-bound

Soil: any well-drained potting soil mix will do fine

Fertilizer: heavy feeders; use water-soluble, all-purpose fertilizer; hibiscus food can be successful

Family: Nyctaginaceae (Four-O'Clock)

Origin: Brazil. In 1768, when Admiral Louis de Bougainville 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.

Growing Bougainvilleas: These tropical members of the Nyctaginaceae (Four-O'Clock) family are very vigorous, evergreen, woody vines with spines. Although normally climbers, they can be trained to stay bushy as pot plants, hanging baskets,

or as standard 3 or 4 feet high. They will bloom beautifully on branches 18"-20" long. Keep all long shoots cut back to 18"-20" for best bloom. 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.

Culture: They grow readily from cuttings 4"-6" long, and in 4-6 weeks will develop good root systems when given bottom heat and mist. When well rooted in perlite/peat moss mix, they can be potted in small containers in a soilless mix with added perlite to give more drainage. Care should be exercised in transplanting since the fine roots often do not knit the soil together in a firm root ball. When repotting annually, slice off the outer 1"-2" of the root ball, and repot in the same size container. Bougainvillea need very bright light (2,500 fc) and do well under high shade or in full sun. These vines typically lose some leaves for a short time during the winter, but when light conditions are low, leaf loss may occur at any time. Under high light conditions, the colorful bracts will adorn the plant almost constantly and will persist for weeks.

Fertilization: These vines are heavy feeders and respond best to almost constant feeding with 1/2 strength water soluble fertilizer, e.g., Peter's 20-20-20, Excel 21-5-20, Miracle Grow or Rapid Grow. With high light and constant feeding, the plants will bloom at least 11 months of the year. Hibiscus food has also been a very successful fertilizer.

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

Insects: Bougainvillea are almost completely insect-free. The occasional "cabbage looper" or aphid can be treated with the appropriate pesticide.

Best Varieties: The blooms as we know them are not true flowers, but are 3 large papery bracts that encircle small, white, tubular flowers much like the poinsettia. Some of the best bougainvilleas to look for in your local garden centers are: golden yellow 'California Gold', gold and green variegated 'Vickie', the dark pink flowers of 'Juanita Hatten', and a new mutation with green leaves splattered with gold. 'Barbara Karst' is bright red to



bluish crimson in shade, blooms very young, and likes heat. 'Sundown' has an apricot color, vigorous, good bloomer, heavy feeder. 'Jamaica White' is white, veined with green, blooms young, vigorous. 'Texas Dawn' has smaller pink flowers in huge clusters, vigorous, keep cut back. 'Double Pink' is a clear pink, vigorous, keep trimmed back, spent flowers must be cut off because it will not shed flowers in the typical fashion. 'Surprise' is large, clear pink-white bi-color flowers, easy bloomer.

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 1/2 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. Try to use a mix consisting of 4 parts well-rotted pine bark, 3 parts peat moss and 2 parts coarse perlite. To about 5 gallons of this mix add 1/2 cup of Osmocote and 2 tablespoons of 19-5-9 slow release lawn fertilizer.