

**TIBOUCHINAS, BEAUTIFUL — CHANGEABLE,
A CHALLENGE**

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The genus *Tibouchina*, which has over 300 recognized species is fascinating, to say the least, with the largest concentration of species in south-eastern Brazil. A secondary grouping can be found in the Andes Mountains from northern Argentina through Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Columbia, through to Venezuela. Some species extend as far north as Mexico.

Over 20 years ago, through the personal efforts and love of the tibouchina plants, they were imported from South America to Australia by Dr. George Hewitt and Mr. Bill Bewley.

Personally, I feel I have been honoured by the help and confidence these two fine men have instilled in me over the past 9 years or so. Consequently I have accepted and carried out the challenge to promote as many tibouchinas as I consider to be of merit for future propagation.

I do this, bearing in mind the importance of ready and popular sales by our retail nursery outlets.

In Alstonville, we have created hybrids from *Tibouchina* species, and have found many sports

Some tibouchina trees exceed 75 feet in height in their natural habitat, but most species are small trees and shrubs usually found in secondary forests — on mountain slopes, and along streams. They are predominantly sun requiring plants; only very few do well in shade. The flowers of the genus are mainly purple with exceptions such as *T. granulosa* 'Rosea', which is pink. A pleasant characteristic of some of the species is their ability to change the colour of their flowers from white on opening to pale pink, then pink, and finally magenta, as in our recent release *T. 'Noelene'*.

All tibouchinas are very distinctive in their own right. They, nevertheless, have the same three-veining leaf pattern of most Melastomaceae.

Some of our releases here in Australia are: *T. 'Alstonville'* (deep purple, flowering profusely in the Lenten period). *T. 'Elsa'* (white, with purple veins in flowers; large velvety leaves). *T. 'Kathleen'* (pink — similar to *T. granulosa* 'Rosea'). Our spectacular sport at the moment is *T. 'Alstonville Variegata'* (cream and green leaves; purple flowers, as in 'Alstonville').

In Brazil Tibouchina, the glory tree, is also known as 'Quaresmeira' or 'Quaresma Flower' — Quaresma meaning the 40 days of Lent, this being the normal flowering period. This name particularly applies to *Tibouchina granulosa*, and its cultivars

Of the large number of known species, only relatively few have found their way into the greenhouses and gardens of the world outside of Brazil, with the possible exception of Florida and California. They are highly regarded in their homeland for their magnificent floral display during the Lenten period. They are extensively planted in parks and gardens where their decorative and ornamental value is unsurpassed by any other tree or shrub.

Tibouchinas require an acid soil and respond to generous feeding together with adequate watering especially during spring and summer. A warm, sheltered position should be chosen. Any pruning that is necessary should be done after flowering

Our propagation method for tibouchina is as follows: For a rooting mix for cuttings use $\frac{2}{3}$ coarse sand and $\frac{1}{3}$ peat plus a small amount of Diatomite (coarse grade). Use young tip cuttings and treat with a prepared hormone such as "Rite Gro Striking Powder No. 4". Root under mist with bottom heat at about 80°F This should give 90% to 100% rooting

PROPAGATION OF FICUS SPECIES BY AIR LAYERING

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This method can be used to propagate several *Ficus* species such as *F. benjamina* and *F. elastica*

Firstly, get an old pair of secateurs and, in the centre of the cutting blade, grind out $\frac{5}{16}$ " deep by $\frac{3}{4}$ " wide (8 mm deep and 20 mm across) and then sharpen that gap or radius in the blade to the same angle as the original blade. To the inside of the handle end, weld a piece of steel 65 mm long and 40 mm wide and in that piece of steel, put a tapered V, 25 mm wide and 30 mm long, which is serrated similar to a saw-tooth or multi-grip plier's teeth.

Next you need a sheet of aluminum foil similar in thickness and quality to take-a-way trays (the difficulty is trying to buy this material from the manufacturers of take-a-way trays; you have to buy 28 lb rolls and months of proving you are not