

BOUGAINVILLEA – Paper Flower by Jonathan Cain

Bougainvillea are flowering climbers bearing curved spines in alternate leaf axils with which they cling to any support available. The woody main stem grows up to 15 meters tall. Blooms gather at the tips of the branches. The real flowers are insignificant but are enclosed in showy corolla-like bracts which constitute the



decorative value of the plant. Bougainvillea flower continuously from spring to autumn in warm-hot regions. As bonsai, the flowers should be removed when they fade to encourage a second blooming period. Style pruning is done at the end of winter. Bougainvillea shoot readily on old wood therefore do not be afraid to re-shape when necessary. All small secondary branches must be removed in any case to encourage new twigs and profuse flowering.

The twigs and branches are very brittle and snap easily. However, they heal very easily once cracked.

During the winter months the plant should be kept on the dry side but must be watered copiously as soon as the buds start swelling and when the plant is in bloom. This will not only prevent wilting but will prolong the life of a flush of flowers by at least a fortnight.

Bougainvilleas love a sunny, hot location. They will survive reasonably cold nights but have little resistance against icy winds. Repotting is every third year and should present no problems. Fertilizing should consist of alternate organic and inorganic hydroponics feeds to encourage flowering even further.

Propagation is by means of cuttings and layering. Cuttings 15 cm long and about 0,5 cm in diameter strike quickly in pure, clean, sharp sand. The new plants are potted up in training containers when the leaves no longer look tender.

Bougainvillea are best grown in the formal and informal, semi-cascade and cascade styles and are best trained through clip and grow method.