

# GROWING GARDENIAS IN CANBERRA



Few things say summer like the rich perfume of Gardenias. Although they come from tropical areas, it's not hard to find a place to grow them in a cold climate like Canberra's. You can easily enjoy these handsome small evergreens with very fragrant blooms.

## **WHAT DO GARDENIAS LIKE?**

Gardenias originate in tropical areas that have much warmer winters than Canberra and higher annual rainfall and humidity. Gardenias will be happiest when you can give them 3 main things:

- **Warmth and sun.** With Canberra's harsh summer sun and low humidity, choose a spot that gets morning sun or filtered sun for much of the day (eg. under shadecloth). Or plant them near a wall that stores heat on winter days and radiates it back at night, reducing the impact of frost. A north facing masonry wall is ideal; courtyards and nearby paving can help too. Or grow gardenias in a pot that can snuggle in the sun under the eaves of your house in winter.
- **Lots of fertiliser.** Feed generously with a fertiliser suitable for acid-loving plants (ie. no lime!). Feed regularly between October and March but do not feed in the cold months, even if the plant looks yellow, which often happens in cold climates. We recommend Healthy Earth fertilisers.
- **Lots of water and good drainage.** Gardenias need a moist soil, but with good drainage. If there's not enough water, they will drop their flower buds (cold spells can do this too) and some leaves may yellow and drop. So make sure the soil includes plenty of moisture-holding compost and has free drainage. If your garden has drainage problems, use raised beds or pots. Mulch will help with moisture too, but do make sure you keep it well away from the stem.

## **ARE GARDENIAS GOOD FOR POTS?**

Pots are perfect for growing gardenias, especially if you want to move them into more shelter in winter.

Ensure you use a high quality and acidic potting mix: Gardenia, Camellia and Azalea mix is ideal.

## **WHAT KINDS ARE GOOD FOR CANBERRA?**

*Gardenia florida* is perhaps the most popular as it is a small shrub that repeat flowers right through the warm months. It is also used as a low hedge in protected positions. *Gardenia radicans* is a handsome and fragrant ground cover variety. Look out too for more unusual varieties with golden flowers or with single flowers.

Prune or trim in March to keep them bushy, although this often means sacrificing some flowers!

## **PEST AND DISEASE MANAGEMENT**

**Yellow leaves** can be concerning at times. It is natural for the older leaves to go yellow in one go when the plant redirects its energy into producing flowers - feeding can help. Or it could be a sign of scale attack (see below). A major cause of yellowing leaves is simply the cold of winter slowing the plant's metabolism (sound familiar?) - yellow leaf symptoms will fade as the soil and weather warm up and the plant can better circulate the missing nutrients. Epsom Salts are usually not needed - just use a good complete fertiliser like Healthy Earth. If problems persist, bring in a sample and chat with our famously helpful staff.

**Scale** insects are a common pest (they look like small brown lumps on stems and under leaves). Spray with Eco Oil or Pest Oil as directed. Then fertilise the plant to build its resistance.