

Boab *Adansonia gregorii*



Description

The boab tree, *Adansonia gregorii*, occurs mostly in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. It is outstanding for its huge bottle-shaped trunk that is filled with soft fibrous wood, enabling it to store water. A deciduous tree, it loses its leaves in the winter months in the tropics when it is dormant.

The boab can live for hundreds of years and grows slowly to a height of 5–15 m and a trunk circumference of up to 20 m. The fruits are large, brown and oval-shaped, up to 18 cm long with a woody and hairy exterior. They contain numerous seeds and a white pithy substance.

Flowers

Large, showy, cream, fragrant flowers occur usually during the summer and autumn months. They open early in the evening and are pollinated that night. Each flower lasts for only a day or two before falling.

Growing conditions

The following information provides guidance for those growing their own boab from seed in the southwest region of Western Australia or similar climate.

Seed preparation

Extract the small kidney-shaped seeds by cracking open the outer woody coating of the large fruit. Remove as much as practical of the pithy substance surrounding the seeds.

How and when to sow seed

In southern areas, such as Perth, seeds should be sown in late October–December. Using native seed-raising mix, sow in 100 mm size pots covering the seeds with a depth of the mix equivalent to a seed's thickness. Place the pots in full sun and keep seeds moist at all times. Germination should occur within 3–4 weeks.

Raising seedlings

The germinated seeds will grow rapidly until about the end of March, and will require daily watering to ensure they remain moist at all times. From about early April the seedlings' leaves will begin to yellow and fall, which is normal for these deciduous plants and a signal to stop watering. They will become dormant for a period, remaining leafless until December. During this time, keep the pots in the sunniest, warmest location, protected from winter rain, and do not water them to prevent the roots from rotting.



Boab fruits, germinating seedlings and established seedlings. Photo: BGPA

NATIVE PLANT NOTES

When the seedlings start to shoot new green buds from the dormant tips, normally in December, recommence watering and apply three-to-six month blend slow-release native fertiliser. Application of a soil-wetting agent is recommended as the soil will have become quite dry and possibly water repellent. Consider transferring the seedlings into larger pots using native potting mix. Place the pots in full sun and as the young plants begin to grow, increase watering until they are watered daily while they are in full growth.

Continue the annual winter protection, potting and fertilising cycle for about 5–10 years, before planting the trees in the garden. As the pot size increases to beyond a ten-litre capacity pot, it is recommended to incorporate some additional sharp, coarse river sand into the native potting mix to further improve drainage. It is also recommended to grow the specimens to approximately one metre tall before planting them out to provide them the best opportunity to cope with the cold, wet southern winter period while they are dormant.

Transplanting

When planting boabs in the ground, it is best to plant in early summer, when the new buds start to appear. Plant in the hottest and sunniest location in the garden; protected from salt-laden wind. Soil should be free-draining with additional sharp, coarse river sand incorporated into it.

Watering

Watering should only occur when plants are in leaf and growing. The irrigation system for this tree should be modified to ensure that the growing area is controlled from a unique solenoid to provide total control. During winter months the installation of a black plastic covering over the root zone to shed winter rain away from the base of the trunk and its roots zone is advised. The protective sheet should be installed once leaf-fall occurs in May and can be removed in early November.

Pruning

Pruning should not be needed.

Fertiliser

Use a 3–6 month slow-release native-plant fertiliser at the time of planting and at the beginning of summer each year.

Pests and diseases

Adopting the above cultivation strategies will remove the likelihood of pests and diseases.

Miscellaneous

Boabs are highly valued by Indigenous people for their edible fruits, medicinal uses and water-holding properties. The pithy material surrounding the seed is edible and has a tangy taste.



Boab tree in Kings Park in March. Photo: D. Blumer

Further Information

Gardening Advisory Service, a free service provided by Kings Park Volunteer Master Gardeners.
Phone: (08) 9480 3672 or Email: garden.advice@bgpa.wa.gov.au.

Pest and Diseases Information Service, Department of Agriculture and Food.
Freecall 1800 084 881 Email: info@agric.wa.gov.au or visit www.agric.wa.gov.au.