
ASTILBE*

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Astilbe japonica, misnamed "spirea", is also known by some suppliers as "ostrich plume". This perennial plant also may be grown as an attractive pot plant. It is normally forced from March to early May.

Fall dug Astilbes can be forced after they have received at least 6-12 weeks storage at 35-45°F to break dormancy. It is suggested that forcing crowns have 3 or more eyes.

Traditionally the pre-cooled crowns are potted into 5 to 8 inch pots 10 to 14 weeks prior to sale. Roots are not pruned prior to potting, but are forced into the pot.

A porous, well drained mix with good water retention is suggested. Add some extra peat moss. The pH should be 6.0-7.0 according to DeHertogh (1984) but Bennerup (1985) reports that limestone is not required.

Maintain uniform moisture by placing the crop on a capillary mat system or use automatic watering. Greenhouse humidity should be kept high to insure good breaking and flower spike development.

Liquid feed with a complete NPK fertilizer.

Force at 60°F for 10-14 weeks, depending upon cultivar. Generally the pink cultivars force easier than the reds which force easier than the whites.

Cultivars suggested by DeHertogh (1984) for trial forcing include:

Red: Etna, Fanal, Koln, Koblenz, Montgomery,
Red Sentinal and Vesuvius; Pink: Bonn, Bremen, Europa,

*Based in part upon a paper presented by Stephen LaVander and Brenda Johnson in Plant Science 298, Greenhouse Crop Production.

Federsee, Mainz, Peach Blossom and Rheinland; White: Aualanche, Deutschland, Gladstone and Irrlicht. Sunny Border Nurseries (Kensington, CT) cultivar suggestions include, in addition to many of the above, (red) Spinel, Bonn, Fever and Glut, (pink) Sprite and White Gloria.

If possible, grow only dwarf cultivars, as some of the normal garden types are three feet tall. Tall cultivars can be contained by applying two 5,000 ppm daminozide (B-Nine or alar) sprays one week apart, when the spike begins to elongate.

Spider mites and aphids may infest astilbe. Kelthane or Pentac should control the spider mites and Thiodan, Pirimor, or Malathion the aphids. An application of Temik (aldicarb) should control these pests and provide incidental control of nematodes which have been reported to be a problem. Two diseases sometimes occur; powdery mildew, controlled by Karathane or Benlate and root rots, controlled by Banrot or a Truban - Benlate combination drench.

Caution: Do not use nicotine or cyanide, as they have been reported to cause foliage damage.

Astilbe should be sold when the inflorescence (plume) begins to show color. Make sure that you tell your customers that these perennials may be planted in the garden to provide years of enjoyment.

References

- Beattie, D. J. and E. J. Holcomb. 1983. Effects of chilling and photoperiod on forcing Astilbe. HortScience 18:449-450.
- Bennerup, Pierre. 1985. Sunny Border Nurseries, Kensington, CT (personal conversation).
- DeHertogh, August. 1984. Guidelines for forcing of Astilbe (False Spirea). Holland Flower Bulb Technical Services. Bul 12.
- English, W. S. et. al. 1969. Commercial production of pot plants. Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, England, bulletin 112:33-34.
- Kiplinger, D. C. 1955. Greenhouse potted plants. Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station. Worster, Ohio. Book Series B-2:28,48.