



Information Sheet: Xanthorrhoea

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Commonly known as grass trees, there are 28 species of Xanthorrhoea in Australia. They have a typically black trunk as the result of bush fires hence the other name "black boy".



SURVIVAL: Only a small number of reputable companies successfully transplant grass trees from the wild. They need to be carefully dug and cared for. It can be difficult to see whether a tree has been correctly transplanted for many months because death is delayed as its considerable food storage reserves are only slowly depleted.

AGE: In natural habitat the trunk will grow approximately 9mm per year. Therefore, a tree with a metre long trunk could be 100 years old. In cultivation, growth can be faster and trees are also more likely to grow multiple heads.

SHAPE: Xanthorrhoeas are typically single straight trunked specimens that grow to 5 metres tall. Changes in trunk direction are usually caused by the production of flowers or accidents, e.g. another tree falling onto the apex and then eventually growing in a vertical direction again. Every tree is unique and has years of history reflected in its growth.

RESIN: Your tree may have hard resin balls near its base. During bush fires, the intense heat melts the natural resin in the bark and this oozes out at the base. One hundred years ago this resin was extracted and used in gunpowder, paint and as a source of phenols.

PLANTING OUT: Select well drained soil. If in clay bed or drainage is bad, mound above ground, plant on a slope or dig drainage trench to improve plant drainage. Choose a sunny area, avoiding total shade. Plant at natural depth making the hole 20cm larger than root ball. Do not cut rootball to fit hole. Combine garden mix with and Add Wetta-Soil and slow release fertiliser at time of planting. Wash in and compact soil around roots, ensuring the trunk is firm. Dedicate a water system (2 bubblers, spray stakes or drips, but no overhead sprinklers) so that all the root ball and developing roots get wet once per week for the first 24 months. These plants initially require watering in wet season for first year. Monitor your soil moisture content regularly. Apply fertiliser or manure in spring and autumn to stimulate re-establishment. Apply anti-transpirant monthly if in coastal or high wind area. Check foliage monthly for any signs of pest or disease. Apply pesticide, fungicide and/or white oil to foliage as needed. Remove tree leaf debris from foliage regularly to prevent fungal infestation. Cut off all flower stalks for the first two seasons to reduce plant stress. If the leaves become dry or brown, trim off 1/3 to 1/2 of the foliage to encourage new growth.

FLOWERING: In their natural habitat, it is rare for a Xanthorrhoea under 600mm to produce a flower spike. but when transplanted into good soil they often flower more prolifically. As the flower spike was the active growth point of the tree, it is natural for the tree to remain dormant and not produce new leaves until a dormant bud is activated which may take years.. Do not over water or over fertilise, just be patient. Your tree has already survived a long time and may not be in hurry to get along with living just now.