

The distinctive *Strelitzia* (bird of paradise) is one of the best known of all the tropical flowers and is a cousin to the banana. Surprisingly, the bird of paradise is easier to grow than many tropical plants. The plant is a vigorous, rapidly growing indoor plant. It can be moved outside in the summer, and in warmer climates, it thrives for half the year outside. Bird of paradise typically flowers in the late winter or early spring, but under optimal conditions, it flowers at other times.

Strelitzia Varieties

There are five *Strelitzia* species, but only two are grown as indoor plants: *Strelitzia reginae* (the orange bird of paradise) and *Strelitzia nicolai* (the white bird of paradise). These plants grow with upright leaves emerging directly from the soil; there is no trunk. The large leaves range between 12 and 18 inches long, and they can shred when exposed to windy conditions or when brushed in a busy hallway.

Grower's Tips

S. reginae and *S. nicolai* are beautiful plants that can be successfully grown inside. The biggest drawbacks are their size—they grow to 5 to 6 feet tall—and the fact that the plants need three to five years before they flower. They work well in massed plantings outside or as [specimen plants](#) in warm climates, where their flowers rise above the foliage for an impressive display.

The trick to successful growth indoors is providing lots of bright light with some direct sun, regular waterings and warmth. Feed with compost early in spring before new growth begins and then fertilize every week or so during the growing season. For the best chance of survival, grow the plant in a container that can be moved outside in warm summer months and then brought back inside for winter.

To bring the plant to bloom once it is four to five years old, keep it pot-bound. Give it plenty of sun and feed it on schedule.

Bird of Paradise Growing Conditions

Attention to the basics keeps this showpiece in the best health.

- **Light:** This plant needs bright light, even including some direct sunlight, to bloom well. However, it requires shielding in direct midday summer sun, which can burn the leaves of younger plants. A good position is in a room with windows facing east or west. Avoid rooms with only a north-facing window.
- **Water:** Keep the soil continually moist throughout the year. You don't want it to be waterlogged, but you can expect to need to water it daily in the spring and summer as it loses moisture through its big leaves. Bird of paradise prefers high humidity and you might want to keep a spray bottle handy to mist it if your home is dry. If overwatered the plant will develop crunchy brown leaves. If under watered the leaves farthest from the center will turn yellow.
- **Temperature:** Keep the air temperature above 60 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter. This is not a cold-tolerant plant, and it recovers slowly from frost damage.
- **Soil:** Use rich, well-drained potting mix.
- **Fertilizer:** Feed in the springtime with slow-release pellets or weekly during growing season with liquid fertilizer. This plant is a heavy feeder.

