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## White Bird of Paradise

### Strelitzia nicolai

The evergreen White Bird of Paradise (*Strelitzia nicolai*) belongs to the banana family. Its long and narrow leaves create an upright standing fan, and therefore it grows somewhat wider than its relative, the *Strelitzia reginae*. The up to 20 cm wide blossoms form the shape of a bird's head and spring from a high leaf during spring and summer time. Since the blossoms can flourish for a couple of weeks but always with only a few at the same time, your efforts of cultivating the White Bird of Paradise are rewarded with an accordingly long blossoming period. The blossoms are also very decorative when kept in a vase. Because of its rich nectar, the pollination in its natural habitat not only happens through birds, but through the sweet-loving monkeys as well.

**Natural location:** Its natural habitat is South Africa, but the White Bird of Paradise spread until Mosambique and Zimbabwe and can also be found on the Canary Islands.

**Cultivation:** Seed propagation indoors is possible throughout the year. Unfortunately, you have to wash off the nice coating of the seeds with soapy water and scald it with hot water afterwards, to stimulate and prepare the sprout. Keep it for another 12 hours in the water, which will slowly cool down to room temperature, so that the swelling further increases the germinability of the seed. Now you can press the seeds gently in the moist potting compost and put just a little compost earth on top. Cover the seed container with clear film to prevent the earth from drying out. Don't forget to make some holes in the clear film and take it, every second or third day, for about 2 hours completely off. That way you avoid mold formation on your potting compost. Place the seed container somewhere bright and warm between 20°C and 25°C and keep the earth moist but not wet. The germination usually takes about three to six weeks.

**Place:** Accordingly to its African origin, the *Strelitzia nicolai* needs to be kept in a bright and very sunny spot to achieve a rich blossoming. During summer you can keep it outdoors, preferably in a place near a heat storing wall and wind-protected, since the leaves of bananaplants can be torn easily by strong winds.

**Care:** Because of its huge leaves and the high evaporation, your plant needs plenty of water, especially during summer. But avoid water logging. Between April and September you should also add fluid fertilizer for tub plants. Start repotting only after roots are coming out of the water drainage holes. Dead leaves should be torn out rather than cut off to get rid of the entire leaf.

**During the winter:** During hibernation in a bright and warm place at room temperature, see that the earth is constantly moist but on a smaller scale than before. Add fluid fertilizer for tub plants once a month. If your plant is kept in a bright but cooler spot with a minimum temperature of 10° Celsius, then you should prolong the regularity of watering and fertilizing once again. To prevent pest infestation due to dry air, it is best to spray with lime-deficient water from time to time.