

# The Archibald Archive – Genus Guides

## ROSCOEIA

These arresting tuberous-rooted, herbaceous perennials are relatives of the gingers, members of Zingiberaceae and closest to the genus *Cautleya*. Their hooded, large-lipped, orchid-like flowers make them among the most exotic-looking hardy plants. There are approaching 20 species distributed through the eastern Himalayan region and south-western China, particularly in Yunnan and Sichuan. All are relatively slow-growing but permanent in well-drained, humus-rich or peaty soil in light shade. Several will sow themselves freely in British gardens where suited. Like most of the ginger family, they enjoy rich-feeding. They are at their most active when the weather starts to warm in summer. Many do not appear above ground until late in spring but several will go on flowering until late autumn when they are eventually cut down by frost. As they vanish completely to their underground tubers for the winter, it is as well to mark the site where they have been planted to avoid damage to the new growth in late spring.

Seed sown in winter usually germinates well when a sufficiently high temperature is reached in spring or it can be sown in warmth under glass in winter. Their tropical ancestry makes it unlikely that any will actually require a cold period to induce germination but we are not certain of this. It is usually easiest to leave the seedlings alone in the container and liquid-feed for the first year after germination. The tubers can then be sorted out and potted individually, when dormant during their first winter, or even planted out in the garden in spring just before they start growth. When established in the garden, all the ones we grow are temperature-hardy in Britain but the young tubers can be vulnerable if frozen solid in their seedling containers, so it is best to overwinter young seedling tubers rather dry and with some protection. This also applies to free-standing, mature, container-grown plants.

Nomenclature and Further information: The nomenclature we use follows the 1982 revision of the genus by Jill Cowley: *Kew Bulletin* 36: 747-777. *Roscoeia* is now also covered in the 'Flora of China' (accessible at 'Flora Online': <http://flora.huh.harvard.edu:8080/flora> ). There is no comprehensive account of this genus with particular relevance to gardeners available.

[‘The Genus *Roscoeia*’ by Jill Cowley was published by Kew in 2007 ISBN 9781842461341 <http://www.kewbooks.com/asps/ShowDetails.asp?id=609> Ed.]