Squirrel's Tail

Justicia betonica



Squirrel's Tail flowers
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 8 feet

Spread: 5 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 10a

Other Names: Paper Plume, White Shrimp Plant, Hawaiian Torch

Description:

An upright shrubby plant featuring attractive, mid-green ridged leaves, and terminal spikes of green veined, cream colored bracts, revealing white to violet tubular flowers ; an excellent accent choice for the garden, or containers

Ornamental Features

Squirrel's Tail features showy spikes of white tubular flowers with creamy white bracts at the ends of the branches from late winter to late spring, which emerge from distinctive chartreuse flower buds. It has attractive green foliage with chartreuse veins. The textured oval leaves are highly ornamental and remain green throughout the winter. The smooth bark and brown branches add an interesting dimension to the landscape.

Landscape Attributes

Squirrel's Tail is a dense multi-stemmed evergreen shrub with an upright spreading habit of growth. Its relatively coarse texture can be used to stand it apart from other landscape plants with finer foliage.

This is a relatively low maintenance shrub, and should only be pruned after flowering to avoid removing any of the current season's flowers. It is a good choice for attracting bees and butterflies to your yard. It has no significant negative characteristics.

Squirrel's Tail is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Mass Planting
- Hedges/Screening
- General Garden Use
- Container Planting

Planting & Growing

Squirrel's Tail will grow to be about 8 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 5 feet. It has a low canopy with a typical clearance of 1 foot from the ground, and is suitable for planting under power lines. It grows at a fast rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for approximately 30 years.

This shrub does best in full sun to partial shade. It prefers to grow in average to moist conditions, and shouldn't be allowed to dry out. It may require supplemental watering during periods of drought or extended heat. This plant should be periodically fertilized throughout the active growing season with a specially-formulated acidic fertilizer. It is not particular as to soil pH, but grows best in rich soils. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution. Consider applying a thick mulch around the root zone in winter to protect it in exposed locations or colder microclimates. This species is not originally from North America. It can be propagated by cuttings.

Squirrel's Tail makes a fine choice for the outdoor landscape, but it is also well-suited for use in outdoor pots and containers. With its upright habit of growth, it is best suited for use as a 'thriller' in the 'spiller-thriller-filler' container combination; plant it near the center of the pot, surrounded by smaller plants and those that spill over the edges. It is even sizeable enough that it can be grown alone in a suitable container. Note that when grown in a container, it may not perform exactly as indicated on the tag - this is to be expected. Also note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.