

heliconia

BOTANICAL NAME

Heliconia spp. (hel-i-KO-nee-a)

COMMON NAMES

Lobster claw, False bird-of-paradise, Parrot flower

DESCRIPTION

Heliconias are grown for their brilliant, unusual flower heads (bracts), which rise from clusters of bananalike leaves. *Heliconias*' size and height vary greatly depending on the species. Some are as short as 2 feet tall, and some grow to 25 feet in height. The colorful bracts may be erect, pendulous or spiraling.

COLORS

Most *Heliconias* have more than one color in the blossoms. The colors include hues of red, pink, yellow, orange, green and white.

VASE LIFE

Consumers can enjoy *Heliconia* flowers for up to three weeks, depending on variety and the care and handling the flowers receive.

availability

Heliconias are available year-round.

vase-life extenders

PROCESSING TIPS Do not submerge *Heliconias* in water, as is often done with gingers and *Anthuriums*. To remove the white powder that often covers the flower heads, stems and leaves, sponge the areas with a room-temperature solution of soap that contains a few drops of cooking oil, rinse with fresh water and allow to dry. Plant shine products also can be used; follow label instructions.

REFRIGERATION *Heliconias* are sensitive to low temperatures, which can cause them to turn a bluish or gray color, so never expose them to temperatures below 55 F.

quality checklist

BLOOMS *Heliconia* blossoms need to be harvested and chosen at their peak of maturity because they do not develop after they are cut. Look for blossoms that have high gloss and vivid color. Avoid blossoms that are creased or marred. Don't purchase *Heliconias* too far in advance.



H. WAGNERIANA
RAINBOW HELICONIA
EASTER HELICONIA



H. ANGUSTIFOLIA
HOLIDAY HELICONIA

WATER Check the water level daily, and add warm flower-food solution as needed. Recut the stems every two to three days to ensure effective water uptake. Misting frequently will assist in bud development and opening.

ETHYLENE SENSITIVITY *Heliconias*' sensitivity to ethylene is low.



HELICONIA CARIBAEA 'FLASH'
WILD PLANTAIN, BALISIER



H. CHARTACEA 'SEXY PINK'



H. VELLERIGERA 'SHE KONG'

of note

DESIGN TIPS *Heliconias* are perfect for nearly every floral need, from tropical-themed weddings to everyday home and commercial designs. Their long vase lives make them a good choice for designs that are expected to last a long time, and their unusual shapes make them suitable focal points for contemporary designs.

CONSUMER CARE TIPS Advise customers to display *Heliconias* away from direct sunlight and heat sources, and to mist them for longer enjoyment.



H. COLLINSIANA
COLLINS' HELICONIA



H. GRIGGSIANA 'FULL MOON'



H. ORTHOTRICHA



H. RAULINIANA



H. ROSTRATA
FISHTAIL HELICONIA



H. CARIBAEA X. BIHAI
'JACQUINII'
WILD PLANTAIN, BALISIER

fun facts

MEANING "Heliconia" refers to Mount Helicon in Greece, home to the Muses, goddesses of the arts and sciences in Greek mythology. The Muses were said to be eternally young and beautiful, thus the name "Heliconia" refers to the flowers' long-lasting and attractive qualities.

FAMILY Heliconias are the only genus in the Heliconiaceae family. The genus has about 200 to 250 species and many cultivars. Heliconias were once grouped in the Musaceae (banana) family and the Strelitziaceae (bird-of-paradise) family, giving it one of its common names, "false bird-of-paradise."

ORIGINS Heliconias are native to South America, Central America, the Southwest Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia.

ON THE WEB The Web site of The Heliconia Society of Puerto Rico, Inc., www.heliconiasocietypr.org, has photos of many of the species of Heliconia that are in production. **sfr**



H. PSITTACORUM
PARROT FLOWER, PARAKEET FLOWER

Some information provided by:
The Chain of Life Network®, www.chainoflifenetWORK.org
SAF's Flower & Plant Care manual
The Heliconia Society of Puerto Rico, Inc.,
www.heliconiasocietypr.org

Reach "Cut Flower of the Month" writer Steven W. Brown, AIFD, at sbfloral@aol.com or (415) 239-3140.

Photos courtesy of Asocoflores, The Colombian Association of Flower Exporters; Blue Ribbon Blossoms; and Hawaii Tropical Flower Council

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