

I Like Spike



Some great new additions have revamped this crop, which is making it an even better accent and component plant.

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C. australis 'Torbay Dazzler'

Sure enough, if you wait long enough all the old plants come around new again. The good old spike dracaena (*Cordyline australis*) will be making its come back soon as well. It may even be a little too early to find a lot of the newer types in the United States, but it pays to be looking. Some of these new forms are absolutely awesome and refined; this is no longer the grassy thing your mother always put in the center of her geraniums. This is something you need to market as a rarity, especially the colored forms. I have so far only found one source for the more rare colors of this group, and that is a mail order

nursery in the UK. The good news is that many people seem to have the more common hybrids, so you will be able to find some great new accent and component forms of *Cordyline australis*.

HISTORY OF THE SPIKE

OK first, just forget the word dracaena; one thing taxonomists agree on is that this plant is not, and has never been (but who knows with the new molecular genetics tools may be), a dracaena. You'll still find it marketed both ways of course, but our industry never lets a little taxonomy get in the way of a sale. This group of plants comes from New Zealand and Australia, so they have not only excellent



Cordyline australis



Cordyline australis 'Sundance' (Photo courtesy of Twyford)

**Culture Quickie:
Cordyline indivisa and *C. australis***

Fertilization. 150 ppm balanced is fine; avoid high levels of ammonium nitrogen.

Watering. They like very dry conditions; allow plants to dry well between watering. Decreased watering will not slow growth and avoids root rot, which will be your main enemy.

Media. Well-drained bark and peat media get the water out of the pot as quickly as possible. Maintain pH at 5.6-6.2.

Production temperatures. 60-65° F nights and 70-85° F days. Very tolerant of temperature fluctuation, and cool greenhouses are fine as long as plants are not wet.

Light levels. Bright light is essential to good growth and foliage color (5,000-plus foot-candles) at all times. Get the plants outside or hardening off as soon as possible, but use care when going into direct sun.

Propagation. Seed, cuttings (rooting media temperatures 65-75° F).

Crop timing. Propagation of cuttings takes 2-3 weeks and seedlings about 10 weeks from seed to transplant. From tissue culture liner to finished 4-inch takes about 6-8 weeks, gallons 8-12 weeks depending on environment.

Growth regulators. Not needed.

Flowering. Plants usually need to be about 3-4 years old before they flower, and while not an ornamental flowering plant, the flowers usually have a sweet fragrance and are a major mess.

vegetative matters



C. australis ‘Sundance’ from tissue culture. (Photo, courtesy of ForemostCo) may still be a staple in your area. with uniform growth), and it became a commodity, which means that in its hey-day, of the almost 25 years, it was everywhere. Unfortunately, since it was everywhere, people took it for granted, and its popularity went down the tubes; kind of like Ford Pintos. Still the plant was drought tolerant, cold tolerant and reliable. It just didn’t have enough elasticity to change with the market.

Next enters the *Cordyline australis* group. These are just beginning to gain popularity as a new crop and component plant. New, new, new and ♦ doing exactly the same thing their predecessor did, just a whole lot better.

Figure 1. Cordylines and their characteristics.

SCIENTIFIC/HYBRID NAME	CHARACTERISTICS
<i>Cordyline australis</i>	Green
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Emerald Isle’	Green, fine texture
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Kirkii’	Green, bright
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Sunset’	Green with bright red leaf bases
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Autumn’	Green, dark with burgundy leaf bases
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Coffee Cream Bronze’	Greenish bronze
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Sundance’	Green with reddish leaf base and new growth
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Jurassic Jade’	Greenish-purple
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Torbay Dazzler’ aka ‘Torbay Sparkler’	Variegated cream edges on green
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Albertii’	Green/white multiple stripes variegation
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Aureo-striata’	Variegated cream edges on green
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Pink Champagne’	Variegated, gray green with white and rose hues
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Pink Stripe’	Burgundy striped with deep pink, red
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Atropurpureus’	Reddish burgundy
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Brandy’	Reddish burgundy
<i>C. x gibbingsiae</i> ‘Red Fountain’ (<i>C. australis</i> and <i>C. pumilo</i>)	Reddish burgundy
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Red Star’	Broader leaf blade, bright reddish burgundy
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Torbay Red’	Broader leaf blade, burgundy
<i>Cordyline</i> ‘Purple Tower’ (<i>C. australis</i> and <i>C. banksii</i>)	Purple fading to reddish burgundy
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Red Sensation’	Purple red
<i>C. australis</i> ‘Purple Heart’	Reddish burgundy
<i>C. baueri</i>	Wide blade, reddish burgundy
<i>C. stricta</i>	Thin bladed, greens to black purple

drought hardiness, but also great cold tolerance. I have seen them used in mixed summer containers all over the United States and Europe, and also surviving in winter containers at a ski resort in Utah under 2 inches of snow.

Cordyline indivisa is a fairly limited group of grassy upright, single-stemmed, relatively fast-growing species with green, purple (Purpurea) and bronze (Rubra) forms. These are the plants that became so popular they killed their own market. It was the classic case of a plant marketed to death as the upright component of every mixed



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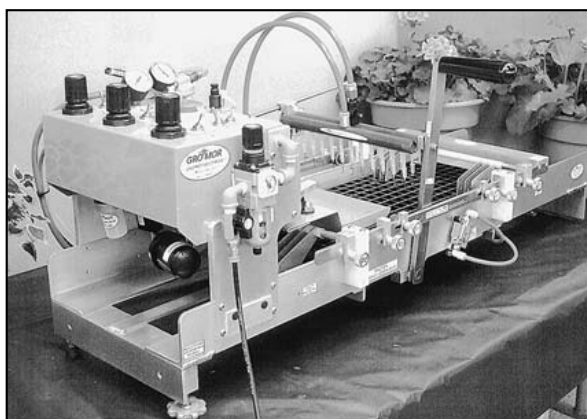


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This group is a little coarser in texture and a lot more diverse in color, but it has all the same great tough aspects of *C. indivisa*. To get the colors, of course, we have to go to vegetative production and tissue culture, so I guess you can also say goodbye to the seed market for now on this species. Most of the hybridizing is done by seed production, and the seed is very easy to grow; it is just not reliable in terms of color. I have to admit that I am really partial to the variegated forms, especially those with white and pink tones such as 'Torbay Dazzler', 'Pink Champagne', 'Pink Stripe' and the green and white forms. One of these plants makes a specimen; used as a component plant they are truly incredible!

GROWING TIPS

The main issue to remember is that these plants hate to be overwatered. Most growers kill the crop with too much water and commercial peat media that gets moist and cold during early-season production. Punish your watering person if they have a heavy hand, and follow up with good preventative fungicide applications. It seems that cooler temperatures will bring out more color in the foliage, so they can be grown in the early season but will persist into fall plantings as well.

I can't stress enough that you need to market these new tissue culture and vegetative types of cordyline as a premier item; do not sell it off cheap, or you'll defeat the whole purpose of new introductions. Market them for more while they are new and different; there is always a point when they don't have the pull anymore, but that is when you should be looking for something new anyway. Oh, and by the way, they make a passable houseplant, so think about recycling anything you have left over from spring into the interior plants section. **GPN**

For more information on varieties discussed in this article, direct your inquiries to the following companies or your favorite broker.

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Cordyline x 'Purple Tower'

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