

Welwitschia mirabilis from Seed

Seed should be sown during the warmer months, spring or summer. In habitat the seeds are dispersed in spring, but have to wait for rain to fall before they germinate. Sow in a well drained mix, to which extra grit has been added. Cover the sown seed with a layer of grit. Water with a dilute fungicide copper based fungicide. Seal in a plastic bag or enclose in a propagator and keep at 25 – 30 Deg C. The mix must not be allowed to dry out.

The placement of the un-germinated seed and germinating seedlings is also important. Choose a well-aerated, warm atmosphere, preferably in filtered sunlight. The plants are very sensitive to sudden changes in light intensity. Never move a plant from a shady situation to full sun, the leaves will burn and the plant may never recover and die. So when moving your plant, make sure that you gradually harden it off to brighter light.

Germination should occur from 7 days to a few months after sowing. The first sign is the cracking of the soil and the appearance of the two cotyledons, initially pink in colour, becoming green. Initial growth is very rapid, particularly the growth of the taproot. It is essential that seedlings in a shallow pots be planted out as soon as the cotyledons appear. They need deep pots due to the tap root and may eventually be grown in 'rose pots'. Take care when transplanting, if the root tip is damaged or broken, the seedling will die. Keep the seedlings well watered during the first season. The warmer the temperature, the faster they will grow. It is better to give too much water than too little, but remember the fungicide.

Seedlings should be watered regularly, at least once a week at first, and later watering can be reduced to once every two weeks. The amount of water also depends on the climate, cooler climates requiring less watering than hot dry ones. During the natural resting period in winter, watering should be reduced, and increased again in late spring when the weather warms up again.

Welwitschia reacts well to being fed, and 'green up' and grow a bit more rapidly in response to a mild, natural, organic seaweed-based fertilizer added to the water once every three months during the summer.

At all times bear in mind that although well adapted to desert life, they are not succulents and there is a danger, especially early in life that they will die due to being kept too dry. As long as you remember to add fungicide at every watering your plants should not succumb to fungal infections.

A well grown *Welwitschia* may flower in its 4th year (although 6 -7 is more likely), but you will need both male and female plants to produce seed.