

Kniphofias – Cool Pokers

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The genus *Kniphofia* is named after Johann Hieronymus Kniphof (1704-63), a German professor of medicine. The correct (?) pronunciation is Ker-nip-hoff-ear, but nobody seems to dare, and it remains incorrectly pronounced as Knife-oh-fear wherever you go. The common name is 'Red Hot Poker', and whilst many species and forms have red and yellow spikes of flowers, there are many desirable forms which are 'cool' pokers.

Kniphofia 'Tawny King' is one of our favourites, vigorous, with caramel coloured flowers on strong stems over a long period from July onwards. 'Toffee Nosed' is similar but shorter. For a complete change, 'Ice Queen' has green and pale cream flowers and associates well with pale *Achilleas* or variegated foliage plants for a really cool show. It grows to about four feet (1.2m) and is sturdy and floriferous.

In the yellow spectrum, 'Dorset Sentry' and 'Drummore Apricot' with acid yellow and apricot flowers respectively, give a good display especially in a group rather than as a single clump. 'Percy's Pride' is a pale canary yellow with a hint of green and was raised at Bressingham by Alan Bloom who named it after his foreman Percy Piper. 'Maid of Orleans' was raised by Amos Perry around 1950 and is a pale ivory yellow. It does well with us, and sets lots of seed for the adventurous to experiment with.

According to the books, *Kniphofia* grows best in a well drained soil which is moist in summer and drier in winter – not an easy combination. But we have found that provided the evergreen foliage is left intact during the winter, it will deflect rain from the rootball and provide an adequately dry zone. As far as summer moisture goes, *Kniphofias* never, ever, need watering on our heavy clay which dries to concrete hardness, so perhaps the books are wrong or we are just lucky.

Most years I raise a batch of seedlings from most of our named cultivars in the hope of finding something new and worthwhile. I sow the seed in the first week of January in pots, and place them outdoors, unprotected from the weather. Wall to wall germination occurs around April time, and they are ready for pricking out individually into four inch pots by the beginning of June. Most flower in their second year and we then have the pleasure of assessing their worth. None have been bad, and one or two rival the named forms and have been grown on in the garden where they have established quickly, but it takes a few years before they show their true habit, size, and colour.



K. 'Maid of Orleans'



K. 'Ice Queen'



K. 'Tawny King'



K. 'Toffee Nosed'