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. Its attractive textured oval leaves remain green in color with distinctive chartreuse veins throughout the year. The brown stems can be quite attractive.

Landscape Attributes

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

This is a relatively low maintenance plant, 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. Although it is technically a woody plant, this fast-growing plant can be expected to behave as a perennial in our climate if planted outdoors over the winter, usually regrowing from its base (crown) the following year. As such, gardeners should take into consideration that it will perform differently than it would in its native habitat.

This plant 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. 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 is a fine choice for the garden, but it is also a good selection for planting 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 growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.