



Photo: Tanja Lenz

## Plant of the Week

# Giant Spear Lily *Doryanthes palmeri*

In recent years, the **Giant Spear Lily**, *Doryanthes palmeri*, has become a favourite landscaping plant and the enormous rosettes of tall, sword-shaped leaves have been used to great effect along roadside verges, in parks and in gardens. In Sydney, we are more familiar with **Gynea Lilies** (*Doryanthes excelsa*), a close relative which produces flowers in huge, globular heads at the tops of a long, sturdy stems.

The flowers of the **Giant Spear Lily** are equally remarkable but are produced in elongated, compound racemes up to a metre and more in length. The name is quite descriptive, derived from the Greek, **δόρυ** or dory, a **spear** and **άνθος** or ánthos, a **flower**. They are certainly some of the most unusual and unique plants of eastern Australia. There are only two species in the genus *Doryanthes* which itself is the only genus in the Australian endemic family **Doryanthaceae**<sup>1</sup>.

Perhaps it is fortunate that the Giant Spear Lily is now so widely planted as it is listed as **vulnerable** under the **Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995**. In its natural environment, the Giant Spear Lily grows on rocky outcrops in wet sclerophyll forest along the ranges that form the Mount Warning caldera<sup>1</sup>. The flowers of both species of *Doryanthes* are a rich source of nectar, which, in its fermented state, is known to produce some unpredictable and erratic behaviour amongst our avian friends<sup>2</sup>.



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<sup>1</sup> K.L. Wilson, In Harden, G. (Ed.), 1993. *Flora of NSW*, Vol. 4, pp. 80-81, NSW University Press, Kensington.

<sup>2</sup> Rodger Elliott, 2003, *Australian Plants for Mediterranean Gardens*. Rosenberg Publishing, Dural.

Map: Australia's Virtual Herbarium: <http://www.chah.gov.au/avh/avhServlet>

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