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Traveller's Tree

Ravenala madagascariensis

Lifeguard for thirsty adventurers!

Worth Knowing: The lean and tall-growing *Ravenala* belongs to the family of the *Strelitzia* plants, although it is unique in its leaf arrangement. Its laminae are placed in a 90 degree angle to the leaf stalks, and sitting on a palm-like stem so they appear as accurate fans. Kept in a tub the Traveller's Tree can grow up to two meters and is suited for a place in a bright room. Its name comes from the waterpockets on the leaf bases that are said were once indeed life saving. In Madagascar the long-stalked leaves are traditionally used for roofing and the leaf veins as building material.

Natural Location: The Traveller's Tree comes from Madagascar and is nowadays widely found in the Tropics.

Cultivation: Seed propagation indoors is possible throughout the year. Unfortunately, you have to wash off the nice blue waxy coating of the seeds with soapy water and scald it with hot water afterwards, to stimulate and prepare the sprout. Keep it for another 12 hours in the water, which will slowly cool down to room temperature, so that the swelling further increases the germinability of the seed. Now you can plant the seeds about 1 cm deep in moist potting compost and cover the seed container with clear film to prevent the earth from drying out. Don't forget to make some holes in the clear film and take it, every second or third day, for about 2 hours completely off. That way you avoid mold formation on your potting compost. Place the seed container somewhere bright and warm between 20°C and 25°C and keep the earth moist, but not wet. The germination usually takes two to five weeks.

Place: Accordingly to its natural habitat, the *Ravenala* should be kept as bright and sunny as possible. During the summer it prefers a full sunny and wind-protected place outdoors.

Care: A large pot and nutritious soil are mandatory for a healthy growth. During summer, it also needs a strong and penetrating watering, without waterlogging in the saucer since that might cause the fleshy roots to rot. The best way is, to wait with the next watering until the upper layers of earth went dry. From April until October it is recommended to give fertilizer for tub plants every two weeks. Long-term fertilizer is not advisable since the nutrients are unevenly distributed between the narrow rooting. Dead leaves should be torn and not cut off, to get rid of the leaf bases as well.

During the winter: Keep your *Ravenala* during the winter in a bright spot with temperatures between 10° and 20° Celsius. See that the earth stays constantly moist, but on a smaller scale and keep fertilizing sparingly once a month. Due to the dry air from the heater in the house, you should spray your plant regularly to protect it against aphids that you can also easily wipe off from the long and smooth leaves.