
Bird of Paradise – A Profitable Flower Crop in Yercaud Region

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ABSTRACT

Bird of Paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*) is a high-value ornamental flower gaining popularity in floriculture due to its unique appearance, vibrant colours, and long vase life. The favorable agro-climatic conditions of Yercaud in the Shevaroy Hills such as moderate temperatures, well-drained soils, and adequate rainfall make it highly suitable for its cultivation. The crop requires well-drained, fertile soil, moderate sunlight, and semi-cool temperatures for optimal flowering. It is relatively low-maintenance, though proper fertilization, support for flower stalks, and pest and disease management are essential for good yield. Plants begin flowering in 2–3 years and can produce economically for up to 8–10 years. With increasing demand in urban markets for floral arrangements and decorations, Bird of Paradise offers strong market potential. It provides good income opportunities for tribal farmers, especially in hill regions like Yercaud, and contributes to livelihood improvement through diversification, employment generation, and sustainable agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

Flower crop cultivation has emerged as an important component of modern horticulture, especially in hilly regions where it provides significant income opportunities for farmers. The demand for ornamental flowers has been increasing due to their use in hotels, major events, bouquets, and landscaping. Among the various attractive flowers grown commercially, Bird of Paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*) is highly valued for its unique shape and vibrant colours. Its striking appearance, resembling a flying bird, makes it widely used in floral arrangements and decorative displays.

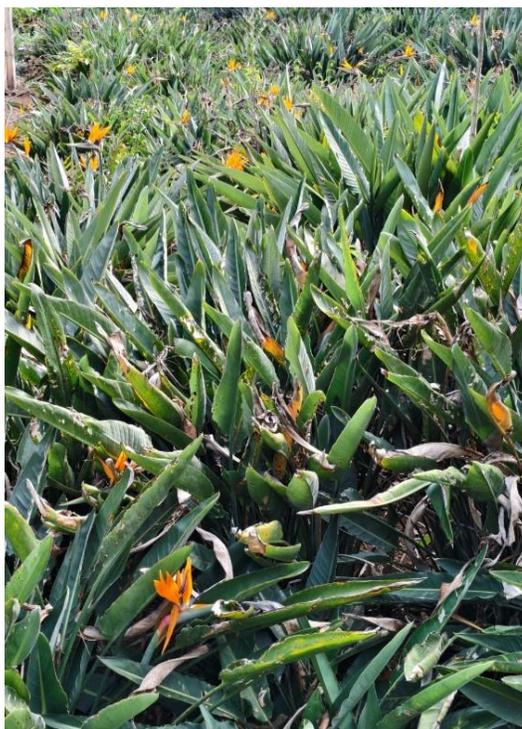
Yercaud, a hill station located in the Shevaroy Hills, possesses a favorable climate for flower cultivation. Moderate temperatures, well-drained soils, and adequate rainfall make this region suitable for growing various ornamental plants, including Bird of Paradise. This crop is suitable for farmers in this region as it requires relatively low maintenance and has good market demand. With the increasing popularity of exotic flowers in urban markets, Bird of Paradise cultivation is becoming a profitable venture for farmers in Yercaud. The journey of this attractive flower from cool hills to urban markets highlights the growing success of floriculture-based agriculture in the region.

YERCAUD HILLS: A SUITABLE REGION FOR CULTIVATION

Yercaud, situated in the Shevaroy Hills, is well known for its favorable agro-climatic conditions for horticulture and floriculture crops. The region lies at an altitude of about 1,200–1,500 meters above sea level, providing a cool and pleasant climate throughout the year. Such conditions are ideal for cultivating exotic ornamental crops like Bird of Paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*).

The moderate temperature range of 15°C to 25°C, along with sufficient rainfall and humidity, creates an ideal environment for healthy plant growth and flower production.

In addition to its climate, Yercaud's soil conditions further support successful flower cultivation. The soils are generally well-drained, ranging from loamy to red loamy types, and are rich in organic matter due to continuous leaf litter from surrounding vegetation. Good drainage is essential for crops like Bird of Paradise, as the plant grows from rhizomes that are sensitive to waterlogging. Slightly acidic to neutral soil pH enhances nutrient availability and root growth. Other natural advantages include shade, natural slopes, and abundant organic residues, which help maintain soil fertility and moisture. These factors reduce the need for intensive inputs and support sustainable flower cultivation.



LIGHT REQUIREMENT

Bird of Paradise can be grown in full sun or partial shade. Increased light exposure promotes better flowering. Low light reduces flowering, while excessive sunlight, especially during summer, may scorch the leaves.

TEMPERATURE REQUIREMENT

The crop flowers well in a semi-cool temperature range of 17–27°C. Night temperatures of 10–13°C and day temperatures of 20–22°C are ideal for early and uniform flowering. Temperatures above 27°C promote leaf growth and reduce flowering.

SOIL REQUIREMENT

Bird of Paradise grows in various soil types but performs best in well-drained, fertile, humus-rich, and slightly acidic soils.

PLANTING

For commercial cultivation, plants can be spaced at 60 × 60 cm, accommodating about 4 plants per square meter. Pits of size 60 × 60 × 60 cm are prepared and filled with a mixture of soil, sand, and farmyard manure in a 1:1:1 ratio. Planting is ideally done at the beginning of spring or the onset of the rainy season.

Since the plants produce tall flower stalks, proper support systems are necessary. Two or three rows of wires supported by iron poles are sufficient.

FERTILIZATION

Phosphorus-rich fertilizers are essential for healthy growth. Fertilizers should be applied monthly during the flowering period. Apply well-decomposed farmyard manure at 4–5 kg/m² and NPK at 20 g/m² one month before the initiation of flowering.

MAINTENANCE

Due to their tall flower stalks, plants are prone to bending. Proper support using iron rods, bamboo stakes, or nylon wires is necessary. After flowering, dried leaves and flower stalks should be removed using sharp tools.

PEST AND DISEASE MANAGEMENT

Bird of Paradise is susceptible to mealybugs and scale insects. Regular monitoring is essential. Mild infestations can be controlled using soap solution sprays. For severe infestations, recommended doses of insecticides like methyl parathion or malathion can be used.

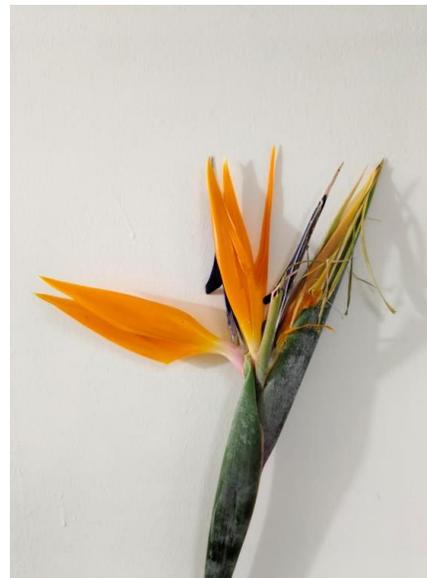
Root rot is caused by fungi such as *Thielaviopsis basicola* and *Rhizoctonia*. Proper drainage and avoiding overwatering are essential. Fungicides like Dithane or Captan may be applied. *Botrytis cinerea* is a major post-harvest issue. Treating flowers with solutions containing 200 mg/L benomyl or thiabendazole helps control fungal growth.

YIELD

The number of flowers per plant depends on plant age, health, and management practices. A healthy plant can produce about 10–15 flowers per year.

HARVESTING

For local markets, flowers are harvested when the first floret opens. For distant markets, harvesting is done when the flower shows an orange-yellow color but has not fully opened.



Harvesting is done early in the morning by cutting the stalk near ground level. Stems are immediately placed in water.

POST-HARVEST HANDLING

Cut stems are trimmed to 60–80 cm in length. Longer stems have better vase life. Soaking flowers in a solution of 10% sucrose + 250 ppm 8-HQC + 150 ppm citric acid for 48 hours improves vase life and flower opening.

PACKAGING AND STORAGE

Each stem is wrapped individually in polyethylene or butter paper and packed in boxes of size 120 × 30 cm. They are stored at 8°C.

MARKET DEMAND AND MARKETING CHANNELS

Bird of Paradise flowers are highly valued in the ornamental flower market due to their unique shape, bright color, and long vase life. Their exotic appearance makes them popular in premium floral decorations.

Demand for exotic cut flowers is increasing in cities, creating new marketing opportunities for farmers in hill regions like Yercaud.

DOMESTIC MARKET DEMAND

The demand for ornamental flowers in India is steadily increasing due to the growth of hospitality, event management, and urban landscaping sectors. Cities like Chennai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad have high demand. Farmers sell through local markets, wholesalers, florists, and auction centers. Good transport facilities help reduce post-harvest losses and ensure better prices.



USES IN FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS

Bird of Paradise flowers are widely used in bouquets, table arrangements, stage decorations, and landscaping. Their long stems and durability make them ideal for hotels, weddings, conferences, and corporate events.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO FARMERS

Bird of Paradise cultivation is a profitable venture for hill farmers due to its high value, long production life, and increasing demand. Once planted, the crop can produce flowers for 8–10 years or more, reducing replanting costs. Maintenance costs are also low.

YIELD POTENTIAL AND INCOME

Plants start flowering after 2–3 years. A mature plant can produce 20–30 flowers annually under good management. Flowers fetch premium prices due to their exotic nature and long shelf life, providing steady income.

ROLE IN IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS OF TRIBAL FARMERS

Farmers in Yercaud can able to get good returns by adopting this crop as a diversification strategy alongside coffee, pepper, and fruits. It helps generate additional income even from small land areas and creates employment opportunities in planting, harvesting, grading, and transport.

CONCLUSION

Bird of Paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*) has emerged as a promising ornamental crop with significant commercial value in hill regions. Yercaud's favorable climate, fertile soil, and natural advantages make it highly suitable for its cultivation. With increasing demand in urban markets and event industries, this crop offers a profitable opportunity for farmers.

Promoting floriculture in hill agriculture can improve rural livelihoods, generate employment, and enhance the economic value of agricultural land. Encouraging farmers to adopt high-value ornamental crops like Bird of Paradise will lead to sustainable and diversified farming systems in hill regions.