

**Portulacaria afra ‘Variegata’**

Portulacaria afra ‘Variegata’ is an indigenous plant known commonly as the ‘Rainbow Bush’ or ‘Variegated Elephant Food’. Although it is a slow growing shrub it is very rewarding when used in a garden.

Portulacaria afra ‘Variegata’ can reach 2 metres in height when fully grown and has attractive cream variegated, rounded succulent leaves on a reddish stem. It grows best in the sun but will cope in semi-shade conditions too, the colour of the leaves being brighter if sun grown. Portulacaria is generally suited to all areas of South Africa but is not ideal if grown in heavy frost areas.

The ’Rainbow Bush’ is not fussy about the soil it is grown in, but does prefer that the soil drains well. It is wonderfully hardy being coast friendly, drought tolerant and water wise. Do not overwater or plant in clay soils as this will cause the plant to rot.

In its natural habitat small lavender pink flowers appear in the spring months. Unfortunately, in cultivated plants, these are not often seen and for gardening purposes the plant is used predominantly for its striking leaf variegation, red intertwining stem and water wise attributes.

Being a ‘Spekboom’ this plants leaves are edible and are used in stews, salads and soups for their slightly tart taste. It is well know as a marvellous carbon collector and is also often used as a soil binding plant where soil erosion is a problem.

Portulacaria afra ‘Variegata’ is an easy to grow low maintenance plant. Its versatility means it works well in many different gardening situations; in hot dry rockeries and in pots; it can be planted with other succulents when water is scarce or with shrubs in a regularly watered garden bed.

As an evergreen Portulacaria afra ‘Variegata’ provides consistent interest with its variegated leaf colour, it is wonderfully versatile and a proudly South African garden shrub!