

Plectranthus ernstii

Family: Lamiceae

Genus: Plectranthus

Species: Ernstii

Origin and Habitat: Originally from a small number of sites in South African KwaZulu-Natal (approximately the Eastern Cape of South Africa). It is known from well drained but mineral poor soils with 30-60 inches of rain annually. They are known to be somewhat specialists in cliff faces, sharing habitat with *Gasteria*, *Crassula* and *Aeollanthus*. Although with high nutrients and water they can shoot outwards, their ability to grow compact is adaptive to the habitat.

Hardiness: Native to twelve habitats, the plant seems to be adaptable to any hot dry climate provided enough drainage. An ideal for arid bonsai style cultivation, it seems to appreciate small pots and drying out between waterings.

Description: Grows erect, up to 11 inches. Grows a swollen tannish caudex with relatively pronounced lateral streaking. All stems can thicken but seems to happen most proximally to base. Leaves are semi succulent with minor round teeth, and are scented somewhat like spearmint, especially when under water stress. Both leaves and tender stems are fairly fragile and snappy when well watered.

Flowers appear relatively frequently with regular watering, and are blue purple with white markings, and look like typical Lamiceae flowers.

Cultivation/Growth: Can be propagated easily by cuttings, which can rot in water but also root very rapidly so this may be tolerable. Anecdotally, a cutting from a single stem can grow into a 1" caudex in under a year with good conditions. Visibly wilts when underwatered but recover quite rapidly. They appreciate well drained soil with frequent waterings especially in summer. A bonsai look can be achieved with frequent aggressive pruning. Can tolerate high light and heat but seem equally adapted to a sunny windowsill indoors.

References:

<https://pza.sanbi.org/plectranthus-ernstii>

http://lilfe.info/Encyclopedia/SUCCULENTS/Family/Lamiaceae/35391/Plectranthus_ernstii

One of the few examples online of native growth habit

