

Three Kings Vine / Native Bignonia

(*Tecomanthe speciosa*)

Introduction:

The Three Kings vine (*Tecomanthe speciosa*), or native bignonia, was first discovered in 1945 on the Three Kings Islands (located off the northern tip of New Zealand) during a scientific survey. The discovery of the single plant was incredible, simply for the fact that this plant had never before been seen. As its common name suggests, the vine belongs to the bignonia family (Bignoniaceae), which is largely a tropical family. The genus *Tecomanthe* is not otherwise represented in New Zealand, but additional members of it are to be found in Queensland (Australia) and New Guinea.



Vital Statistics:

The Three Kings vine is a vigorous twining climber that grows to 10m in height. It has thick, glossy compound leaves consisting of up to five leaflets. In autumn it bears lush, cream-coloured tubular flowers that resemble foxgloves in shape. Its flowers emerge directly from the stem in large clusters, spaced at irregular intervals. *Tecomanthe speciosa* has never been known to reproduce sexually (via cross-pollination) in the wild, although it can pollinate itself. Its flowers have several features that appear to be adaptations to facilitate pollination by bats. However, bats have never been found on the Three Kings Islands.

What makes it unique?

The Three Kings vine is recognized as one of the world's most endangered plants. Only one example of it is known to grow in the wild. It was saved by horticulturalists, after cuttings were taken from the original plant. Ten years later the plant finally set seed. As a result it has since become a popular garden climber. Today the species is still represented in the wild by the original single specimen that has (since its discovery) developed additional vines through the natural process of layering.

Conservation:

It is difficult to estimate how common *Tecomanthe* once was on the Three Kings Islands but by the time of its discovery introduced goats had heavily browsed the island and reduced the entire population to a single individual. Today goats have been eliminated from the island that is home to the vine. In recent times however, one of the trees supporting the vine collapsed taking with it the vine. As a result the vine now receives more light, which in turn may stimulate flowering.