

Chilean flame creeper

Tropaeolum speciosum

Also known as flame flower and flame nasturtium

Description:

- Climbing perennial vine. The whole plant smells strongly like the garden nasturtium which it is related to.
- The thin stems are wiry with coiling tendrils up to 7mm long.
- The leaves are very delicate and each leaf is made up of 5 leaflets.
- Flowers occur from November-April. They are single flowers, tubular shaped and scarlet coloured.
- The fruits are fleshy and are a distinctive blue colour.



Chilean flame creeper
Photo: J. Dodgson



Chilean flame creeper leaves
Photo: Kate McCombs

Where is it found?

Chilean flame creeper is found in disturbed forest and scrub from Waikato to Southland. It is also found in gardens or garden waste dumping sites. It is able to tolerate a wide range of growing conditions including wind, salt, cold and drought.



Chilean flame creeper leaves,
flowers and fruit Photo: Kate McCombs

Why is it a problem?

Chilean flame creeper will climb to canopy levels, smothering existing vegetation and blocking light from reaching the forest floor. With no light, it becomes difficult for native seedlings to regenerate. Birds also spread the seeds to remote areas where Chilean flame creeper becomes difficult to control.



Chilean flame creeper
Photo: Amber Bill

Status and control:

Chilean flame creeper is classed as an unwanted organism and is on the National Pest Plant Accord list. This means it cannot be sold, distributed or propagated within New Zealand.

Unfortunately it is extremely hard to kill and requires ongoing follow-up work. If possible, cut the vine material and dig up the roots. The material then must be carefully disposed of by taking it to a landfill where it is to be buried deeply. Small plants can be pulled out by hand and disposed of safely. Alternatively, cut and stump treat or spray during spring and summer. Be careful when spraying as Chilean flame creeper is a very thin spindly plant, so non-target spraying is highly possible.

For more information on Chilean flame creeper please email weeds@ecan.govt.nz