

*Templetonia retusa*

(Vent.) R.Br.

## COCKIES TONGUES

**Flowering period:** April–August.

**Description:** Much branched, erect, rounded to diffuse shrub 0.3–1.2(2) m high. Leaves 20–30 mm long, somewhat leathery with an incised apex. Flowers produced in the axils of the leaves, red, apricot to cream, often in profusion, large and showy, up to 40 mm long, with the standard (flag-like petal) prominent and keeled with a pale base. Seeds 6–10, pale to dark brown in flattened pods to 50 mm long with rib-like bumps indicating where seeds are present with pods explosively opening when ripe (black in colour).

**Pollination:** Bird and insect pollinated with evidence that feral honeybees visit the flowers but appear to nectar-rob rather than pollinate.

**Distribution:** Widespread, sometimes locally common on limestone, calcareous sands and may occur further inland on gravels and clay soils. Forms compact and semi-prostrate forms in exposed areas although in the coastal zone the plant is susceptible to wind-pruning and favours protected sites. Can return after soil disturbance.

**Propagation:** Easily propagated from seed harvested from near-mature pods harvested once the pods have hardened and changed from green to black. Dry pods in paper bags in a dry, airy location. Once open, seeds can be treated as other legumes with hot water treatment and sown into a free-draining seedling mix. The species is sometimes unpredictable in propagation with seedlings having highly variable growth that may be linked to the presence of suitable nitrogen-fixing bacteria in the roots. Incorporation of a small amount of soil from around a parent plant (ensuring the site is disease free) may aid in growth of seedlings.

**Uses in restoration:** A colourful and useful species particularly in terms of the attractive winter blooming nature of the plant that can make a spectacular display in coastal areas. The plant requires full sun and protection from strong winds.

**Notes:** A well-known and admired plant of coastal areas; however, uncommon in horticulture. The wide variation in colour forms from red to cream would make the species an ideal plant for coastal gardens. The species is highly vulnerable to predation of the seed when in the pod so care is required that pods are carefully examined and only pods without evidence of small holes in the outer surface should be collected. Seed should be cleaned once pods have opened and if possible, frozen overnight to kill off eggs and larvae of any remaining seed predators.



Habit



Flowers



Seed pods



Distribution