

Tower of jewels

Echium wildpretii



The genus *Echium*, family *Boraginaceae*, comprises 60 species of herbaceous plants native to the Mediterranean region, the Canary Islands and Madeira. Some species are: *Echium wildpretii*, *Echium webbii*, *Echium fastuosum*, *Echium lycopsis*, *Echium rubrum*, *Echium vulgare*, *Echium decaisnei*, *Echium creticum*, *Echium simplex*, *Echium callithyrsum*, *Echium candicans*, *Echium hierrense*.

Common names: Tower of jewels, Red bugloss, Tenerife bugloss. It is an endemic species on the island of Tenerife, Canary Islands.

They are biannual **herbaceous plants** (they need 2 years to complete their biological cycle) that reach 3 meters in height when they bloom. They have a curious and interesting conical bearing. The **leaves**, linear-lanceolate in shape, arise in rosettes and are 30 cm long. The most interesting thing is its large conical inflorescence covered with red or pink **flowers** that can turn bluish; they **bloom** from late spring to early summer in their second year of life. The flowers are melliferous and attract bees and butterflies. Even when the plant dies and dries it can be decorative.

They are **used** as isolated specimens, in small groups and to add color notes to the lawn.

Echium wildpretii needs full sun **exposure** and high temperatures. They do not resist frost.

They need the **soil** to be well drained; they can grow in stony and poor substrates but they appreciate that it contains organic matter.

They resist drought quite well; **water** moderately waiting for the substrate to dry.

They do not need **pruning** or **fertilizers**.

They are plants resistant to the wind and the usual **pests and diseases**; they are sensitive to excess moisture.

They **propagate** by seeds sown in spring in a sandy and slightly humid substrate.

Echium wildpretii is one of the types often referred to as a “Towers of Jewels,” and is also commonly known as the Red Bugloss or Mt Teide Bugloss. The names are very apt because it has very tall flowering spikes of red flowers, and it is found growing naturally up on Mt Teide in Tenerife in the Canary Islands. The Red Bugloss, or “Taginaste Rojo,” as it is called in Spanish, is actually a very rare species in the wild because it is only found in this mountainous location and around the mountain village of Vilaflor. The Red Bugloss, which can reach around three m (10 ft) in height is often grown in gardens and parks, though it needs protection in areas where there is frost in Winter. Seeds of this species are easy to find in Internet searches, and it will grow successfully in many parts of North America. Red Bugloss grows best in the ground but can also be cultivated in pots and containers as long as these are big enough and well-drained. The Red Bugloss hates having wet feet! In its first year it produces a large rosette of leaves, which is followed in the spring of the following year by its flowering spike. It is well worth waiting for the second year of growth because the Red Bugloss definitely has the wow factor!

