

A stunning new species of dragon tree discovered in Thailand

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This is the new dragon tree species *Dracaena kaweesakii* viewed from below showing the rich branching. Credit: Paul Wilkin

The newly discovered dragon tree species Dracaena kaweesakii from

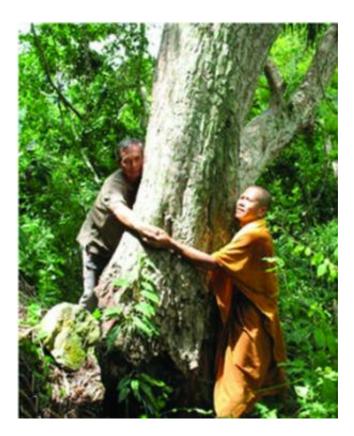


Thailand is characterized by its extensive branching. The new species reaches an impressive 12 m in both height and crown diameter, and has beautiful soft sword-shaped leaves with white edges and cream flowers with bright orange filaments, all highly distinctive features. The study describing this exciting new species was published in the open access journal *Phytokeys* by an international team of scientists.

Dracaena kaweesakii is a relative of the beautiful Canary Island dragon tree *Dracaena draco*. It is an ecologically important <u>species</u> found only on limestone hills and mountains that are often associated with Buddhist temples in Thailand.

Dracaena kaweesakii is extracted from the wild for use in horticulture in Thailand and is one of the more popular species due to its extensive branching. *Dracaena* species in general are thought by Thai people to bring luck to households that have them, hence their popularity. A number of populations of *D. kaweesakii* are protected by proximity to temples or having been transplanted into their gardens. There is no direct evidence yet of over-extraction but sustainability studies are needed at population level to insure the protection of this beautiful species.





This image demonstrates the thickness of a trunk base in a large tree of *Dracaena kaweesakii* showing the corky, fissured surface. Credit: Warakorn Kasempankul/Parinya Siriponamat





This image shows flowers of *Dracaena kaweesakii*. Credit: Warakorn Kasempankul/Parinya Siriponamat

"*Dracaena kaweesakii* is thought to be endangered through having a limited distribution, destruction of limestone for concrete and extraction of trees for gardens," comments Dr Wilkin about the conservation status of the new dragon <u>tree species</u>.

More information: Wilkin P, Suksathan P, Keeratikiat K, van Welzen P, Wiland-Szymanska J (2013) A new species from Thailand and Burma, Dracaena kaweesakii Wilkin & Suksathan (Asparagaceae subfamily Nolinoideae). PhytoKeys 26: 101. DOI: 10.3897/phytokeys.26.5335



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