

# Species of the Month

August 2006



Photo: [www.tropicaflora.com](http://www.tropicaflora.com)



Photo: [www.belizebotanic.org](http://www.belizebotanic.org)



Drawing: [www.toildepices.com](http://www.toildepices.com)

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*Vanilla planifolia*  
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### Treasure of the New World

Plants of *Vanilla planifolia* grow very well under intermediate to warm conditions. They can be found growing in tropical wet forests at low elevations in Florida USA, West Indies, Central America, and northern South America. It is indigenous to Mexico and may have been used up to 1000 years ago by the Totonac tribe as a flavoring. These robust climbing large sized scandent epiphyte vines have green, terete fleshy branching stems with elliptic oblong single leathery leaves about 4 to 5 inches long with aerial roots which cling to its tree host. The plants must be very mature to flower — at least 10 to 20 feet long. The fragrant short-lived greenish yellow 2 1/2 inch flowers are lily-like and develop on axillary racemes producing up to 20 flowers on the flower spike. The flowers open in the morning and close in the afternoon never to open again. These flowers must be hand pollinated due to the lack of the insect pollinator, the tiny bee, the Melipone— midmorning being the best time.

#### LIGHT

800 to 1500 footcandles, bright indirect light, strong shading.

#### HUMIDITY

60% - 70%

#### TEMPERATURE

Intermediate; 55°F minimum to 85°F maximum.

#### POTTING

Large pots with humusy soil or potting medium. Plants can flower anytime if well grown.

#### WATER

Water thoroughly as the plants approach dryness. Keep evenly moist at all times.

#### FERTILIZER

Balanced fertilizer should be applied weekly during periods of active growth, 1/4 to 1/2 strength.