

Pittosporum ellipticum

SYNONYMS

Pittosporum ellipticum Kirk subsp. *ellipticum*, *Pittosporum ellipticum* var. *decorum* Cheeseman, *Pittosporum ellipticum* subsp. *ovatum* Kirk, *Pittosporum ellipticum* var. *ovatum* (Kirk) Kirk

FAMILY

Pittosporaceae

AUTHORITY

Pittosporum ellipticum Kirk

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

PITELL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 24

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon

2004 | Sparse

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Small tree with fuzzy brownish new growth and oval leaves that are paler underneath and with hard capsules that split into two to show the black sticky seed inhabiting the upper North Island. Leaves 5-10cm long, often with some brown fuzz underneath. Capsules also brown fuzzy.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North Island from Te Paki to Mt Pirongia in the west and about the Karangahake and Waioeka Gorges in the East.

HABITAT

Most often associated with kauri (*Agathis australis*) forest, where it often grows on ridge lines, slips scars or in secondary regrowth within cut over kauri forest. Outside this forest association it is often found as part of the understory in tanekaha (*Phyllocladus trichomanoides*), towai (*Pterophylla sylvicola*) or kamahi (*P. racemosa*) dominated forest. Occasionally it can be found growing along flood prone streams and rivers. Irrespective of the vegetation associations it grows in this species prefers relatively open sites, especially along track and roadsides where it typically forms apparently evenly-aged cohorts that probably stem from a single germination event following disturbance.



Flowers, ex. cult. Waipahihi, Taupo.
Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Pittosporum ellipticum old fruits. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Small gynodioecious tree up to 8 m tall but usually less. Trunk and branches dark brown, young branchlets clad in fine, appressed rust-coloured tomentum. Leaves alternate, crowded at tips of branches. Petioles 4-15 x 1.5-2 mm, densely invested in appressed, rust-coloured tomentum. Lamina 30-97 x 15-50 mm, yellow-green to dark green above, pale red-green or reddish-yellow beneath, elliptic-oblong, ovate or obovate, apex and base acute or obtuse, margin entire; emergent and expanding leaves densely invested in appressed, rust-coloured tomentum, soon becoming glabrate above and sparsely tomentose to glabrate beneath, coriaceous. Flowers in terminal 2-6-flowered fascicles; pedicels 5-14 mm, accrescent in fruit, rusty orange to rust-grey tomentose, subtended by several caducous, rusty-tomentose 1-2 mm long bud scales. Sepals linear, acuminate, 8-11 x 2-2.7 mm, rusty-tomentose, ciliate; petals 14-19.5 x 3-3.5 mm, oblanceolate-linear, subacute, recurved at tips, reddish-brown, chocolate or dark golden yellow; stamens 7-11 mm, anthers 1-3 mm. Ovary 2.5-7.5 x 1.5-4.5 mm, invested in rust-coloured hairs, style 1.5-6.5 mm long, stigma capitate or truncate. Capsules, woody, subglobose, 3 or 2-valved, 15-20 x 13-17 mm, covered in rust-brown to rust-grey tomentum. Mucilage yellow-red to orange. Seeds 25-36 (with many aborted), reddish-brown, somewhat irregular in outline.

SIMILAR TAXA

Most similar to *Pittosporum huttonianum* from which it differs by the rust-coloured (rather than grey to grey-white) tomentum on the emergent leaves and leaf undersides.

FLOWERING

July - October

FLOWER COLOURS

Brown, Red/Pink

FRUITING

August - January (though fruit is long persistent and may be seen year round)

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult. Seed may take up to five years to germinate and germination is often poor. Best grown from semi-hardwood cuttings, though even these can be hard to strike. Although an attractive small tree it is often hard to maintain in cultivation, and is prone to sudden collapse in times of stress. This is a shame because the red, orange and yellow-flowered forms are very beautiful.

THREATS

Not directly threatened though it is generally very uncommon throughout its range, and where found it is often known from one or two trees. However, there are exceptions, for example the species is common along the ridge lines of Mt Manaia, Bream Head and in the Waitakere Ranges (especially near Anawhata and Destruction Gully).

ETYMOLOGY

pittosporum: Pitch seed

ellipticum: Elliptic

TAXONOMIC NOTES

In its typical form this is a well marked and very distinctive species. However around the Karangahake Gorge and south of there to the Waioeka Gorge plants referable to *Cheeseman's Pittosporum ellipticum* var. *decorum* occur. These are rather intermediate with *P. huttonianum*. Critical study using molecular markers is needed to resolve this problem.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 30 August 2006. Description adapted from Cooper (1956).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Cooper, R.C. 1956: The Australian and New Zealand species of *Pittosporum*. *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden* 43: 87-188

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Pittosporum ellipticum* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pittosporum-ellipticum/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pittosporum-ellipticum/>