Cordyline pumilio

COMMON NAMES
Dwarf cabbage tree, tī koraha, tī rauriki, korokio

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Monocotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Small shrub consisting of a tuft of long very narrow leaves and often without a visible trunk. Easiest to identify by the long sparse sprays of small white or pink flowers developing into a blueish fruit. Leaves to 1m long x 1-2cm at widest, tapering into a grooved leaf stalk.

Cordyline pumilio - cultivated. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Cordyline pumilio. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Plant forming leafy tufts up to 1 m tall, trunk usually absent, rarely sparingly developed, occasionally reaching up to 2 m tall. Plants often flowering while short stem is leafy to ground; in older plants bare part of stem up to 0.1 × 0.15 mm and usually sprawling, rarely stiffly erect. Leaves 0.30–0.60–1.00(-1.30) × 0.01–0.02 m, yellow-green to green (sometimes red-spotted) ± narrowed above base into channelled petiole; midrib prominent abaxially, at least proximally; margin slightly recurved. Inflorescence an openly, sparingly branched panicle up 0.1 × 0.8 m, axes slender branched to second order;bracts often small and inconspicuous; ultimate racemes 50–300 mm long, axis clearly visible between flowers. Peduncle to 100 × 3–4 mm. Flowers small, widely spaced; pedicels 3-5(-10) mm long, Perianth c.4–5 mm long, whitish, or pink externally; tepals narrow, recurved, 3-nerved. Stigma shortly trifid. Fruit c.4–5 mm diameter, globose, bluish or flecked with blue. Seeds c.2.0–2.5 mm. long, shining, two sides flat and one convex. Description adapted from Moore & Edgar (1970).

SIMILAR TAXA
Easily distinguished from all other Cordyline in New Zealand by its usually “stemless” growth habit (the stems are actually buried beneath the soil). More frequently confused with Dianella or Libertia from which it is easily distinguished by the, yellow-green, prominently ribbed leaves and much larger, lax paniculate inflorescences, and small, globular bluish to white flecked fruits.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North Island from Te Paki (North Cape) to Kawhia Harbour in the west and Bay of Plenty in the East.

HABITAT
Coastal to montane. Often in gumland and other shrubland. Common in kauri (Agathis australis) forest, especially along ridgelines and around slip scars.

GENUS
Cordyline

FAMILY
Asparagaceae

AUTHORITY
Cordyline pumilio Hook.f.

SYNONYMS
None

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October - January

FRUITING
March - May

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Fleshy berries are dispersed by frugivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed and stem cuttings. Does well in full sun in a well drained soil. It an excellent plant for a raised garden or for pot culture on for example a deck. A purple-leaved form of Corydline pumilio is now very popular in cultivation.

ETYMOLOGY
cordyline: From the Greek kordyle ‘club’
pumilio: Small, dwarf

NVS CODE
CORPUM

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 38

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT Help
The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the “Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland” Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Moore, L.B.; Edgar, E. 1970: Flora of New Zealand Vol. II. Wellington, Government Printer.
Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11: 285-309

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 February 2011. Description adapted from Moore & Edgar (1970).
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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/cordyline-pumilio/

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