

Didymocheton spectabilis

COMMON NAME

kohekohe, New Zealand mahogany

SYNONYMS

Trichilla spectabilis G.Forst., *Hartighsea spectabilis* Juss., *Dysoxylum spectabile* (G.Forst.) Hook.f.

FAMILY

Meliaceae

AUTHORITY

Didymocheton spectabilis (G.Forst.) Mabb. et Holzmeyer

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

DYSSPE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 84

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2012 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Canopy tree bearing leaves with 4 pairs of large dark green glossy leaflets along a stem with fifth leaflet at the tip and a swollen base where leaf stem joins the twig. Inhabiting warmer forests. Flowers small, in sprays projecting from trunk and branches. Fruit orange, covered by a husk.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North and South Islands. In the South Island not extending much beyond the Marlborough Sounds, reaching a southern limit near the Hurunui River (Napenape).

HABITAT

Common and sometimes dominant or co-dominant tree of coastal to lowland forest.



Kohekohe. Photographer: Wayne Bennett



Kohekohe. Photographer: Wayne Bennett

FEATURES

Tree up to 15 m tall usually with a broad, spreading canopy. Trunk up to 1 m diam., branches stout, erect then spreading. Bark pale brown, under bark green. Leaves compound, imparipinnate, alternate on pulvinate petioles up to 40 mm long, leaflet pairs 4-6, (50-)-150(-200) x (20-)30(-80) mm, opposite to subopposite, bright green, yellow-green to dark green, ovate to obovate-oblong, leathery, margins somewhat undulate. Plants gynodioecious, with fixed female and inconstant males on different trees. Inflorescence a cymose, drooping, panicle arising from trunk and branches (cauliflorous). Flowers c. 30 mm diam., fleshy. Pedicels short. Calyx divided to base, lobes broad-oblong, abruptly pointed, ciliate, petals linear, 10 mm, spreading, waxy white or greenish. Capsules, woody, broad-obovoid to subglobose, 3-4-celled, c. 25 mm long, green. Seeds 2 per cell, orange or scarlet.

SIMILAR TAXA

A very distinctive tree which with its large compound green leaves and cauliflorous flowering habit could not easily be confused with any other indigenous, naturalised or exotic species present in New Zealand.

FLOWERING

March - June

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, White

FRUITING

April - August

LIFE CYCLE

Arillate seeds are dispersed by frugivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed.

THREATS

Not Threatened. However, where possum and rat numbers are high this species is not actively regenerating. Possums defoliate trees, and will heavily browse inflorescences such that few succeed in flowering and setting fruit. Rats are major seed predators. Only where control of these animals is undertaken, or on possum and rodent-free offshore islands can one see kohekohe flowering, fruiting and regenerating freely. If numbers of these introduced animals remain unchecked, it is clear that kohekohe will decline and vanish from large parts of its natural range.

TOLERANCES

Easily grown in a variety of situations and moisture levels. Intolerant of cold, and frost-sensitive.

ETYMOLOGY

spectabilis: Notable

WHERE TO BUY

Occasional available from specialist native plant, and some mainline commercial nurseries.

Taxonomic Notes

We follow Holzmeyer et al. (2021) in placing *Dysoxylum spectabile* in the genus *Didymocheton* Blume.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

The name of Pukekohe, a town south of Auckland, is an abbreviation of "Puke kohekohe" which means "Hill of the kohekohe".

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange for NZPCN (1 June 2013)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Duguid, F. 1985. Kohekohe *Dysoxylum spectabile* as an accidental epiphyte. Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin, 42: 11

Holzmeyer, L.; Hauenschild, F.; Mabberley, D.J.; Muellner-Riehl, A.N. 2021: Confirmed polyphyly, generic recircumscription and typification of *Dysoxylum* (Meliaceae), with revised disposition of currently accepted species. *Taxon*. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1002/tax.12591>

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

CITATION

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

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/didymocheton-spectabilis/>