

Dracophyllum traversii

COMMON NAME

mountain neinei, grass tree, pineapple tree

SYNONYMS

Dracophyllum pyramidale W.R.B.Oliv.

FAMILY

Ericaceae

AUTHORITY

Dracophyllum traversii Hook.f.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

DRATRA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 26

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Robust small tree with clusters of broad grass-like curved leaves at the end of stout branches. Bark flaky red brown. Leaves 90-300mm long by 40-50mm wide, piling up underneath plant, greyish when young. Flowers in a large pyramid-shaped cluster at the tip of branches. Fruit a dry capsule.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North and South Islands. In the North Island scattered from Waima Forest south to near Taumarunui, East Cape and the southern Central Volcanic Plateau. In the South Island mostly westerly from North West Nelson to Central Otago and eastern Fiordland.



Te Moehau, November. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth



Mt Arthur, January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth

FEATURES

A shrub or a tree 0.2–13.0 m tall. Branches form an open candelabrum-shaped crown. Bark on old branches light brown, flaky, young stems reddish brown. Leaves crowded at tips of branches in a bromelioid manner, lamina sheath light green to light brown, 30–70 × 30–50 mm, coriaceous, striate, tapering, margins membranous, smooth; lamina coriaceous, sometimes with a glaucous bloom, linear-triangular to lanceolate, 90–860 × 17–50 mm, surfaces glabrous, prominently striated; margins cartilaginous, serrulate with 18–20 teeth per 10 mm. Inflorescence shorter than the leaves, dense, 180–400 mm long, pyramidal and densely branched; rachis and pedicels pubescent to hirsute, light green to reddish; inflorescence axis 13.0–16.5 mm in diameter; basal inflorescence branch 30–60 mm long, suberect to at right angles with inflorescence axis; inflorescence bracts caducous, over-topping flowers, light green, whitish at base and pink-tipped to entirely pink, broadly ovate at base, 130–240 × 25–50 mm, surfaces glabrous, margins minutely ciliate. Flowers 500–3000+, in groups of more than 10 at base of inflorescence, pedicellate; bracteoles caducous, recaulescent, deciduous, with one bracteole situated just below the perianth and the other in the middle of the pedicel, shorter than flower, 4.0–4.8 × 0.5–0.7 mm, glabrous; pedicels straight, 0.5–2.0 mm long, pubescent to tomentose. Sepals red to occasionally green, ovate to broadly ovate, 1.2–3.0 × 1.1–2.5 mm, equaling corolla tube, striate, surfaces glabrous; margins ciliate; apices subacute to obtuse. Corolla red, tube sometimes white; corolla tube broadly campanulate, widened at mouth, 2.7–3.0 × 4–5 mm; corolla lobes reflexed, oblong, longer than corolla tube, 2.5–2.8 × 2.0–2.5 mm; apices obtuse; surfaces glabrous. Stamens inserted at top of corolla tube, filaments 1.0–1.5 mm long; anthers exerted, oblong, pink turning light yellow with age and 1.8–2.0 mm long. Ovary subglobose, 1.4–1.5 × 1.8–2.0 mm, glabrous, apex round; nectary scales oblong, 1.0–1.5 long and wide, apices retuse; style exerted, 2–3 mm long, glabrous, lengthening in fruit; stigma five-lobed. Fruit not included in persistent calyx, reddish to purplish brown, 1.9–2.0 × 2.8–3.0 mm, depressed-globose; apex round, glabrous. Seeds yellowish brown, ovoid, 0.95–1.0 mm long, testa slightly reticulate.

SIMILAR TAXA

Dracophyllum traversii is easily recognised by the candelabra-shaped growth habit, bark flaking in large pieces, broad strongly curved leaves, glaucescent young leaves, stout panicle with red flowers having the corolla lobes longer than the corolla tube and capsules 2.8–3.0 mm in diameter. It is most similar to *Dracophyllum latifolium* from which it differs by its more robust growth habit, serrulate rather than serrate to denticulate leaf margins bearing 18–20 rather than 12–30 teeth on their margins; longer and wider sepals (2–3 × 2.0–2.5 mm cf. 0.7–1.5 × 1.0–1.7 mm), with the upper surface glabrous rather than pubescent and the margins rather than toothed in the upper third; by the long corolla tube (2.7–3.0 × 4–5 mm cf. 1.5–2.0 × 1.5–2.5 mm), wide corolla lobes (2.5–2.8 × 2.0–2.5 mm cf. 1.5–2.0 × 1.5–2.0 mm), and subglobose rather than ovate ovary. The seeds of *D. traversii* are smaller than those of *D. latifolium* (0.95–1.0 mm cf. 1.2–1.3 mm).

FLOWERING

October–February

FRUITING

December–May

LIFE CYCLE

Minute seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult. Should not be removed from the wild. Don't be tempted - take photographs instead! *Dracophyllum traversii* is occasionally stocked by specialist nurseries (take care though to check the soil surrounding the rootstock to see if the plants on offer have been dug from the wild, as plants dug from the wild often persist for a few months before dying), and if grown from seed such plants may occasionally thrive in cultivation. Does best in a semi-shaded site, planted in a humus enriched, moist (not water logged) soil.

ETYMOLOGY

dracophyllum: Dragon leaf, from its likeness to the dragon tree of the Canary Islands

traversii: Named after William Thomas Locke Travers (1819–1903) who was an Irish lawyer, magistrate, politician, explorer, naturalist, photographer. He lived in New Zealand from 1849 and was a fellow of the Linnean Society.

WHERE TO BUY

Occasionally available from specialist native plant nurseries.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (3 April 2012). Description adapted from Venter (2009)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Venter, S. 2009: A taxonomic revision of the genus *Dracophyllum* Labill. (Ericaceae). Unpublished Phd Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington.

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

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/dracophyllum-traversii/>