Kunzea ericoides

COMMON NAMES
kānuka

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Common tree of the northern South Island only. Bark flaky. Branches often pendent at ends, bearing masses of needle-like bright green leaves and clusters of small white flowers. Branchlets appearing hairless (sparsely covered in very small erect hairs (20× magnification)). Leaves to 25 mm long, soft to grasp. Flowers borne in ‘corymbiform’ clusters, white with a red centre. Fruit a small dry capsule 1.9–3.4 × 1.8–3.9 mm.

FLOWER COLOURS
White



Nelson. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 06/01/2015, Licence: CC BY.



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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Trees up to 18 m. **Trunk** 1–4, 0.10–0.85 m d.b.h. Early bark brown to grey-brown, ± elongate, usually firmly attached, margins elongate sinuous, ± entire with scarcely any flaking; old bark similar. **Branches** slender, initially ascending soon spreading, apices often pendulous. **Branchlets** numerous, slender, glabrescent; indumentum sparse, deciduous, hairs divergent 0.02–0.05 mm long; leaves of branchlets densely crowded along stems. **Leaves** sessile, ± glabrous, except for the margins; lamina 4.0–25.0 × 0.5–1.8 mm, green to yellow-green, linear, linear-lanceolate, to narrowly lanceolate, straight or with upper ¼ weakly recurved, apex acute, sometimes cuspidate, base attenuate; lamina margins initially finely sericeous, glabrate or glabrous; hairs forming a fine, discontinuous band failing just short of lamina apex. **Inflorescence** a compact corymbiform to shortly elongate 3–15-flowered botryum up 60 mm long. **Pherophylls** foliose ± persistent, 1 per flower; lamina 3.0–7.8 × 0.9–1.4 mm, elliptic, lanceolate to narrowly lanceolate, apex acute, base attenuate. **Pedicels** 1.6–3.8 mm long at anthesis, usually glabrous. **Flower buds** pyriform to narrowly obconic, apex of mature buds weakly domed to flat, calyx lobes distant. **Flowers** 4.1–8.3 mm diam; hypanthium 1.4–3.2 × 1.9–4.1 mm; sharply obconic, apex terminating in 5 persistent suberect to spreading calyx lobes, glabrous (very rarely with basal ¼ finely , sparsely covered in minute hairs). **Calyx lobes** 5, suberect to spreading, 0.4–1.0 × 0.4–1.0 mm, orbicular, obtuse to broadly deltoid, red-green, pink or crimson, margins glabrous or finely ciliate. **Receptacle** green or pink at anthesis, darkening to crimson or dark magenta after fertilisation. **Petals** 5, 1.4–2.6 × 1.5–2.0 mm, white, orbicular, suborbicular to narrowly ovate, spreading, apex rounded, entire or very finely denticulate, oil glands usually not evident when fresh, ± colourless. **Stamens** 10–34 in 1–2 weakly defined whorls, filaments white; anthers dorsifixed, 0.35–0.48 × 0.16–0.24 mm, broadly ellipsoid; pollen white; anther connective gland prominent, pink or pinkish-orange when fresh, drying red to orange, ± spheroidal ± coarsely papillate. **Ovary** 4–5 locular, each with 16–24 ovules in two rows on each placental lobe. **Style** 1.5–2.2 mm long at anthesis; stigma capitate, about 1¼× the style diam., flat, cream or white, flushing pink after anthesis, surface very finely granular-papillate. **Fruits** rarely persistent, 1.9–3.4 × 1.8–3.9 mm, glabrous, dark green to reddish-green, maturing brown to grey-brown to grey-black, cupular, barrel-shaped, shortly cylindrical to hemispherical, calyx valves erect with the apices incurved, split concealed by dried, erect, free portion of hypanthium. **Seeds** 1.00–1.05 × 0.32–0.50 mm, semi-glossy, orange-brown to dark brown, obovoid, oblong, oblong-ellipsoid, or cylindrical and ± curved, surface coarsely reticulate.

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily distinguished from all other members of the *Kunzea ericoides* complex by the glabrescent to glabrous branchlets. The bright green, finely, linear-lanceolate leaves and small flowers with very low stamen numbers also help to identify this variety.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (north of the Buller and Wairau Rivers. Most common in North-west Nelson).

HABITAT

Coastal to lowland shrubland, regenerating forest and forest margins, also present in montane forest, ultramafic shrubland and very occasionally present in subalpine shrubland.

THREATS

Some stands are at risk from clearance for farmland or through felling for firewood.
The arrival of myrtle rust (*Austropuccinia psidii*) in New Zealand (April 2017) is anticipated to have dire consequences for all New Zealand Myrtaceae. Myrtle rust is an invasive fungus which threatens native myrtle species—learn more myrtlerust.org.nz.

GENUS

Kunzea

FAMILY

Myrtaceae

AUTHORITY

Kunzea ericoides (A.Rich) Joy Thomps.

SYNONYMS

Leptospermum ericoides A.Rich.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October–February

FRUITING
November–March

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Seeds are dispersed by wind and possibly water (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Very easy from fresh seed. Seed must be sown fresh, even if left for a few weeks before sowing viability can drop, especially if seed is allowed to dry out. Very difficult from cuttings, though soft wood water shoots give the best results.

CULTIVATION
Uncommon in cultivation. It does not seem to be commericially available. Most plants sold as *K. ericoides* are another, very common, allied species *Kunzea robusta*.

ETYMOLOGY
kunzea: Named after Gustav Kunze (4 October 1793, Leipzig -30 April 1851), 19th century German botanist from Leipzig who was a German professor of zoology, an entomologist with an interest mainly in ferns and orchids
ericoides: Like a heath

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to the Myrtaceae of New Zealand

NVS CODE
KUNERI

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 22

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP, De
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
de Lange PJ. 2014. A revision of the New Zealand *Kunzea ericoides* (Myrtaceae) complex. *Phytokeys 40*: 185 p. https://doi.org/10.3897/phytokeys.40.7973.
Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 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 25 August 2014. Description modified from de Lange (2014).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION
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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/kunzea-ericoides/

PDF DATE

08 June 2026