# Melicytus flexuosus

## BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: CD, DPS, RF
Jump to previous conservation statuses

## CATEGORY
Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

## SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Greyish widely branched tangled shrub with speckled nearly leafless twigs in open sites. Sparse leaves occur on plants in the shade, 10–20 mm long by 1 mm wide, dark green. Flowers small, bell-shaped, sweetly perfumed, under branches. Fruit small, purple.

## FLOWER COLOURS
Cream, Yellow



Melicytus flexuosus, Catlins. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Shrub to 5 metres tall, with interlaced, almost leafless, whip-like, grey-green branchlets. **Branchlet surfaces** pitted with lots of tiny white spots (lenticels). **Leaves** absent or 10–20 mm long, dark green to brown-green, entire or slightly toothed. **Seedlings** have narrow, brown leaves with a few coarse teeth or lobes along their leaf edges. **Flowers** strongly perfumed, pale yellow, c. 2–3 mm diameter. **Fruit** a berry, 3.5–5.0 mm diameter.



Growing in riparian floodplain forest, central Southland. Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Date taken: 16/05/2016, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## SIMILAR TAXA
None.

## DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (Waione Frost Flats and Pureora-Taihape region), South Island (widespread). The northern limit for this species occurs at Pureora in Waikato.

## HABITAT
Fertile alluvial terraces and flood plains in sites prone to heavy frosts and summer drought; often on forest margins and amongst scrub in frosty hollows.

## THREATS
Habitat loss through development, particularly forestry and rural development, weed encroachment.

## GENUS
Melicytus

## FAMILY
Violaceae

## AUTHORITY
Melicytus flexuosus Molloy et A.P.Druce

## SYNONYMS
Hymenanthera angustifolia R.Br auct. non. of N.Z. authors, Hymenanthera dentata R.Br. auct. non. of N.Z. authors, Hymenanthera dentata var. angustifolia (R.Br.) Benth. auct. non. of N.Z. authors, Melicytus angustifolius (R.Br.) Garn.-Jones auct. non. of N.Z. authors.

## TAXONOMIC NOTES
The New Zealand plant has frequently been associated with two Australian endemics, both now transferred to *Melicytus*, and known there as *M. angustifolius* and *M. dentatus* (R.Br.) Mabberly et Molloy respectively.

## ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS
No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

## FLOWERING
August–November.

## FRUITING
February–May.

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Fresh seed, though slow to germinate, is usually the best way to grow this species. It can be grown from semi-hardwood and hardwood cuttings but these are often slow and the strike rate can be very variable.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACU: Facultative Upland
Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

## CULTIVATION
Rarely offered by specialist native plant nurseries and almost never by commercial nurseries. This is a shame because the almost leafless branches and divaricating shrub form, as well as its hardy nature and tolerance of a wide range of soils, climates and moisture regimes makes it an ideal plant for modern gardens.

## PLANT OF THE MONTH
This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for January 2011 for the full story.

## ETYMOLOGY
**melicytus**: From the Greek meli (honey) and kytos (hollow container), referring to the staminal nectaries of the flowers. Literally “honey-cave”
**flexuosus**: Torturous, winding

## NVS CODE
MELFLE

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 32

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: CD, RF
2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: CD, RF
2009 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: RF, CD
2004 | Gradual Decline
Jump to current conservation status

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: DPR, NStr, PF, RF, RR Help
The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Otago conservation status information is sourced from the “Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025” Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Molloy BPJ, Druce AP. 1994. A new species name in *Melicytus* (Violaceae) from New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany 32(2)*: 113–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.1994.10410362.

## ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 1 August 2003. Description based on Molloy & Druce (1994).

## NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): Melicytus flexuosus Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/melicytus-flexuosus/ (Date website was queried)

## MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/melicytus-flexuosus/

## PDF DATE

08 June 2026