Melicytus ramiflorus

COMMON NAME
māhoe, hinahina, whitey wood

SYNONYMS
Melicytus ramiflorus J.R.Forst. et G.Forst. subsp. ramiflorus

FAMILY
Violaceae

AUTHORITY

FLORA CATEGORY
Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE
MELRAM

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 32

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2012 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened

BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Common small tree with a knobbly pale trunk and thin light green toothed leaves that have the vein network much more visible on the paler underside. Leaves 5-20cm long, tapering to tip. Flowers greenish, in clusters along twigs. Fruit purple.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic subspecies. Three other subspecies occur, one endemic to Norfolk (probably a different species), one to Fiji and one to Samoa. In addition forms from Raoul Island (Kermadec Islands Group) and the Three Kings and eastern Northland may warrant formal recognition. Research into this variation is in progress.

HABITAT
Abundant small tree of coastal, lowland, and lower montane forests throughout the country.
FEATURES
Shrub or small tree up to 15 m tall. Trunk 1 or more, 0.6-0.8 m diam, typically much branched from near base. Wood soft, white. Bark greyish-white, underbark bright green. Branchlets numerous, twiggy, rather brittle. Petioles 20 mm or more long. Leaves, firmly fleshy, 50-150 x 30-50 mm, light or dark green, lanceolate-oblong to elliptic oblong, apex acute to acuminate (rarely obtuse), leaf margins coarsely serrated (very rarely subentire, or irregularly coarsely toothed). Inflorescence 2-10 flowered fascicles arising from branchlets or leaf axils. Flowers 3-4 mm diam., female or inconstant male (flowers types on separate plants) borne on slender pedicels 5-10 mm long. Bracts subtending flowers, calyx lobes minute, petals greenish-yellow, yellow (rarely cream), lanceolate, apex obtuse. Anthers sessile, stigma 4-6-lobed. Fruit a violet, dark blue or purple berry, 4-5 mm diam., obovoid to globose. Seeds 3-6 per berry.

SIMILAR TAXA
Most frequently confused with M. macrophyllus which differs by the leathery, somewhat fleshy dark green, often mottled purple, obovate-oblong leaves with rather coarse serrations. Flowers are also larger (6.5-8 mm diam.) and the broader petals are usually white. M. macrophyllus is a species of kauri forests, and is not known with certainty south of Auckland City. The Waikari Creek (near Dunedin) record cited in the New Zealand Flora is the result of specimen mislabelling.

FLOWERING
November - February

FLOWER COLOURS
Green, Yellow

FRUITING
November - March

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easy from fresh seed. Can be grown from semi-hardwood cuttings but generally slow without a mist unit.

ETYMOLOGY
melicytus: From the Greek meli (honey) and kytos (hollow container), referring to the staminal nectaries of the flowers. Literally “honey-cave”
ramiflorus: Branch-flowering

WHERE TO BUY
Commonly cultivated and often available from commercial nurseries. In many urban areas abutting indigenous forest mahoe self naturalises into gardens. The fruits are bird dispersed, so plants can also appear many kilometres from forest remnants.

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Past treatments have recognised four subspecies in M. ramiflorus, subsp. oblongifolius of Norfolk Island, subsp. fastigiata of Fiji and subsp. samoensis of Samoa. Recent treatments, particularly that of Art Whistler have advocated that all of these subspecies should be regarded as distinct species. NZPCN has followed this recent opinion.

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

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION
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