

Melicytus ramiflorus

COMMON NAME

māhoe, hinahina, whitey wood

SYNONYMS

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

FAMILY

Violaceae

AUTHORITY

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

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 knobby 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.



Otari Wilton's Bush, Wellington. Photographer: Jeremy Rolfe



Otari Wilton's Bush, Wellington. Photographer: Jeremy Rolfe

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

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/melicytus-ramiflorus/>