

Myoporum laetum

COMMON NAMES

ngaio

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Spreading tree bearing glossy yellow-green to dark green heavily spotted oval leaves usually occurring not far from coast. New growth very glossy, dark and sticky. Flowers white with purple spots, at base of leaves. Fruit pink, on a stalk.

FLOWER COLOURS

Violet/Purple, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Decumbent shrub, shrub, or small tree up to 10 m tall and in decumbent forms 2-4 m across. Trunk to 0.3 m diam. Bark light grey to brown, thick and corky, firm, persistent, rough and furrowed. Branches stout, spreading. Leaf buds dark brown, purple-black to almost black, very sticky. Petioles flattened up to 300 mm long. Leaves somewhat fleshy, yellow-green to green, conspicuously white to yellow gland-spotted, (40-)100-120 x (10-)30-40 mm, lanceolate, oblong-lanceolate, oblong to obovate, acute to acuminate, margins crenulate-serrulate in upper half to third, margins sinuate to plain. Flowers in 2-6-flowered axillary cymes. Peduncles up to 15 mm long. Calyx-teeth 2 mm, narrow-lanceolate, acuminate. Corolla campanulate, white, purple-spotted, 5-lobed, lobes hairy on upper surface. Stamens 4. Fruit a narrow-ovoid drupe, 6-9 mm long, white or pale to dark reddish-purple.

SIMILAR TAXA

Ngaio could be confused with Tasmanian boobialla (*M. insulare*) but is distinct by its serrated, gland-spotted leaves. We include var. *decumbens* G. Simpson within *M. laetum*, regarding it as merely one extreme of a continuous range of variation present in the species. Aside from leaf shape and size there are no other distinguishing characters. Another species, *M. kermadecense*, endemic to the Kermadec Islands, is rarely cultivated in New Zealand, for distinctions see under that species.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Three Kings, North and South Islands. Also on the Chatham Islands where scarce and probably naturalised.

HABITAT

Coastal to lowland forest, sometimes well inland (in Hawke's Bay, Rangataiki and Wairarapa). Often uncommon over large parts of its range.



Pauatahanui. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 28/04/2006, Licence: CC BY.



Palliser Bay. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 16/08/2010, Licence: CC BY.

THREATS

Not threatened. However, in some parts of the country such as urban Auckland, Wellington and along portions of the Kaikoura coast hybrid swams involving Tasmanian boobialla (*Myoporum insulare* sens. lat.) are common. The widespread planting of Tasmanian boobialla, or hybrids poses a risk to ngaio in places where it is not common.

GENUS

Myoporum

FAMILY

Scrophulariaceae

AUTHORITY

Myoporum laetum G.Forst.

SYNONYMS

Myoporum laetum G.Forst. var. laetum, Myoporum laetum var. decumbens G.Simpson

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October - January

FRUITING

December - June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and semi-hardwood cuttings

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

UPL: Obligate Upland

Rarely is a hydrophyte, almost always in uplands (non-wetlands).

CULTIVATION

Commonly cultivated and sold by many garden centres. However, some nursery stock offered as ngaio is either Tasmanian boobialla or hybrids involving that entity (see Similar taxa).

POISONOUS PLANT

The leaves contain ngaione which has antibacterial properties but is also toxic to livestock, causing liver damage (Brooker et al., 1998). Click on this link for more information about [Poisonous native plants](#).

ETYMOLOGY

myoporum: Shut pore

laetum: Pleasant

NVS CODE

MYOLAE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 108

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RF Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the [“Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland”](#) Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened 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

Allan, H.H. 1961: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. I. Wellington, Government Printer.

Brooker, S. G., Cambie, R. C. and R. C. Cooper (1998). New Zealand Medicinal Plants. Reed: Auckland.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for the NZPCN by: P.J. de Lange (22 April 2011). Description based on Allan (1961)

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/myoporum-laetum/>

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