

Myrsine chathamica

COMMON NAMES

Chatham Island matipo, Chatham Island mapou

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DPT

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Bushy small tree bearing dark green leathery leaves which often has small curled scales below the new growth inhabiting the Chatham and Stewart Islands. New growth hairy. Leaves 2-7.5cm long, those on juveniles much broader (to 120mm wide). Fruit glossy deep purple, arranged along twig.

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow



Henga, Chatham Island. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 31/05/2013, Licence: CC BY.



Myrsine chathamica. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stout, densely branched, gynodioecious, spreading tree up to 12 m tall (rarely decumbent forming sprawling patches up to 5 m diameter). Trunk up to 0.20 m dbh; usually multi-trunked or branched from near base, often bearing numerous root suckers and epicormic growth in exposed conditions; bark dark red-brown, brown or grey-brown, firm (not flaking). Branches numerous, initially upright, then spreading, often twisted, lenticellate; branchlets yellow-green to orange-green, lenticellate, initially clad in 0.2-0.35 mm long, stiff, patent to erecto-patent hairs becoming glabrous with age. Leaves alternate, coriaceous, glabrous, adaxially glossy dark green to green, abaxially paler oil-glands numerous, minute (scarcely evident adaxially, more so abaxially); midrib orange to pale yellow, initially minutely pubescent, slightly raised adaxially, prominently so abaxially, venation evident; petioles 5-10 mm long, rather rigid and somewhat fleshy when fresh, finely covered in 0.2-0.35 mm long, stiff hairs. Lamina 20-75(-120) × 15-40(-80) mm, flat, dish-shaped or recurved along margins, obovate, elliptic, broad-elliptic, apex emarginate or obtuse, margins entire. somewhat thicker than rest of lamina. Inflorescence in dense (1-)3-5(-10)-flowered fascicles. Flowers greenish yellow, pale yellow, or cream, and then spotted dark red or maroon, or wine-red spotted purple-black pedicels 4.6-7.2 mm long in fruit. Pistillate flowers: calyx 1.8-2.2 mm, tube 0.3-0.76 mm, lobes 4(-5), erecto-patent, 0.8-1.1 × 0.6-0.8 mm, oblanceolate, apex acute to subacute, margins ciliolate, cilia white; corolla 2.6-3.0 mm, tube 0.34-0.38 mm, lobes 4(-5), 2.0-2.4 × 1.0 mm, elliptic to elliptic-oblong, margins densely ciliolate, cilia white, apex rounded or obtuse. Antherodes malformed, 0.42-6.0 × 0.3-0.4 mm, apiculus recurved or absent; pollen absent. Ovary 1.8 × 2.3 mm, ellipsoid. Stigma sessile, 2.2 mm diameter, tholiform. Bisexual flowers: calyx 1.6-2.0 mm, tube 0.22-0.70 mm, lobes 4(-5), 0.6-0.9 × 0.6-0.9 mm, deltoid, margins minutely ciliolate, cilia white. Corolla 3.0-4.3 mm, tube 0.3-0.6 mm, lobes 4(-5), 2.8-4.2 × 1.4-2.0 mm, oblong-elliptic, elliptic, margins densely ciliolate, cilia white, apex obtuse to subacute. Anthers 1.9-2.1 × 0.9-1.2 mm, apiculus upright; pollen white. Ovary rudimentary or functional, if functional then 1.2-2.0 mm long. ellipsoid. Stigma sessile 2 mm diameter, tholiform. Drupe (5-)8-10 mm diameter, violet to purple, often white-spotted, globose. Endocarp 5.5-7.0 × 5.3-6.5 mm, circular or broadly elliptic, orange to light brown, surface smooth or slightly irregular, often longitudinally veined. Endocarp description adapted from Webb & Simpson (2001).

SIMILAR TAXA

On the Chatham Islands *Myrsine chathamica* is distinctive, it scarcely resembles *M. coxii* with which it often grows on the southern tablelands. *Myrsine coxii* branches are fastigiately arranged (i.e. like a pitch fork) and it has much smaller yellow-green or dark green inrolled, oval to oblong with emarginate apices or obcordate leaves. In New Zealand, the large, dark green, coriaceous, obovate, elliptic, broad-elliptic, often dish-shaped emarginate leaves with their entire margins are distinctive and serve to distinguish it from all other *Myrsine* with which it grows.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Abundant on the Chatham Islands, occasional on some islands and headlands of Stewart Island and the Foveaux Strait

HABITAT

On the Chatham Islands matipo (*Myrsine chathamica*) is an important forest species ranging from coastal sites to the table lands. Near the coast it often forms the dominant forest cover on limestone and schist outcrops, and it is tolerant of kopi (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*) so mixed kopi-matipo forests are commonly seen. It is less commonly found in the sand country except where sand dunes abut limestone or schist outcrops. In swamp forest it can be locally dominant and is also a major component of the forest cover on the peaty soils of the tablelands. On Stewart and the adjoining Foveaux Strait islands it forms only a minor component of the mixed coastal forest cover seen in these areas.

THREATS

Not Threatened. However, *Myrsine chathamica* is uncommon on Stewart Island.

GENUS

Myrsine

FAMILY

Primulaceae

AUTHORITY

Myrsine chathamica F.Muell.

SYNONYMS

Suttonia chathamica (F.Muell.) Mez, *Rapanea chathamica* (F.Muell.) W.R.B.Oliv.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

September - October

FRUITING

July - February

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed, root suckers and cuttings made of epicormic growth and/or semi-hardwood cuttings. *Myrsine chathamica* is very hardy and moderately fast growing though it will not tolerate drought conditions of high humidity. It is an excellent hedge plant especially in the more southerly coastal parts of the New Zealand. Chatham Islands *Myrsine chathamica* occasionally hybridises with *Myrsine coxii*.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for October 2011](#) for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

myrsine: Myrrh

chathamica: From the Chatham Islands

NVS CODE

MYRCHA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 46

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Webb, C.J.; Simpson, M.J.A. 2001: *Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons*. Christchurch, Manuka Press.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 11 February 2011. Endocarp description adapted from Webb & Simpson (2001).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/myrsine-chathamica/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026