

Notelaea apetala

COMMON NAMES

coastal maire

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: CD, PD, TO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Small hard tree bearing pairs of leathery dark green glossy wavy leaves that are pale green underneath inhabiting coastal forest in the northern North Island. Leaves 5–11 cm long. Fruit purpleish, oval, in loose clusters.

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stout spreading dioecious (?gynodioecious) tree up to 10 m. tall; trunk up to 1 m diameter, sometimes several arising from base, these often twisted; bark firm (not flaking), often deeply furrowed, grey to grey-brown, tessellated. **Branches** spreading, often tortuous. **Branchlets** glabrous. **Leaves** glabrous, coriaceous, dark glossy green above, paler and dull below, margins undulate, somewhat waxy, midrib prominent on both surfaces, yellow; petioles stout, rigid 8–15 mm long; lamina of juveniles 50–120 × 40–90 mm, broad-oblong to ovate, apex acute to acuminate, base cuneately narrowed; of adults 50–80 × 40–70 mm, elliptic-oblong to ovate-elliptic, apex acute to acuminate, base cuneately narrowed. **Inflorescence** a slender 10–18-flowered raceme 30–45 mm long, rachis and pedicels, stout glabrous. **Flowers** 2.5–2.9 mm diameter, greenish to greenish-yellow; males, females (and very rarely apparently perfect flowers) on very slender pedicels; calyx unequally deeply cleft, ovate, subacuminate; males with 2 large exerted anthers, ovary rudimentary or functional; female flower with 2 rudimentary anthers, ovary with large 2-lobed stigma. **Drupe** 10–18 mm long, oblong-ovoid, flesh dark pink, red or purple-black to maroon (flesh somewhat oily); endocarp 9.0–15 × 5.5–8.5 mm, dull, pale orange-yellow, elliptic to narrowly elliptic (and slightly compressed). **Seed** 1–(2) per endocarp, elliptic, purple-brown.



Notelaea apetala - close up of foliage showing upper leaf surface. Note wavy leaf margin. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Notelaea apetala - close up of foliage showing underside of leaves. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA

Privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*) is commonly confused with *Nestegis apetala* from which it differs by its much larger panicle inflorescences, white flowers and much smaller (3–6 mm long) fruits. *Notelaea apetala* could be confused with white maire (*Nestegis lanceolata*), which very occasionally grows with *N. apetala* in northern coastal forest. White maire differs by its much narrower (up to 30 mm wide) narrow- to ovate-lanceolate to narrow-elliptic leaves whose midrib is adaxially deeply impressed. Canary Island olive (*Picconia excelsa*, Oleaceae) when vegetative or fruiting has a strong similarity to *Notelaea apetala* such that it is occasionally (and one assumes “accidentally”) sold as this species. This tree is uncommon in New Zealand being most often seen in parks, street plantings, school grounds and plant collections in northern New Zealand. When flowering it is easily recognised as it has flowers with large prominent white or pink-white petals.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: North Island (northern areas including offshore islands from the Manawatāwhi / Three Kings Islands south to Hauturu Island near Whangamata; especially common on the Poor Knights Islands and Fanal Island (Motukino)—on the latter of which it forms a distinct, pure forest type). Also Norfolk Island.

HABITAT

Strictly coastal. Inhabiting coastal forest often along the exposed margins, also on rocky slopes, cliff faces, talus slopes and exposed ridgelines, as well as forming a minor subcanopy in closed forest. *Notelaea apetala* is often an important component of northern offshore island forests where it co-habits with pōhutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*), tawāpou (*Planchonella costata*), coastal māhoe (*Melicytus novaezelandiae*), *Streblus* spp. (especially *S. banksii*), houpara (*Pseudopanax lessonii*) and whau (*Entelea arborescens*).

GENUS

Notelaea

FAMILY

Oleaceae

AUTHORITY

Notelaea apetala (Vahl) Hong-Wa & Besnard

SYNONYMS

Olea apetala Vahl; *Olea endlicheri* F.Muell.; *Gymnelaea apetala* (Vahl) L.A.S.Johnson; *Nestegis elliptica* Raf. nom. illeg.; *Nestegis apetala* (Vahl) L.A.S.Johnson

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October–January

FRUITING

January–April

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed. An attractive though frost-sensitive small tree that makes an excellent specimen tree for a large garden or street avenue. Once established, *Nestegis apetala* is extremely tolerant of drought, strong winds and salt burn. It does well in large tubs and in raised gardens. Plants do best when planted in semi-shade in a position where they can grow into the light but are remarkably tolerant of being planted into full sun. Aside from its cold sensitivity this is an ideal tree for coastal situations and it deserves to be grown more widely than it is.

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for June 2013](#) for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

apetala: From the Latin prefix a- ‘without’ and petalum ‘petal’,

NVS CODE

NESAPE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 46

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: PD, SO

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: SO

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: CD, DPS, DPT, PF, Rel, TO 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.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand, Volume I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsidea, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085 p.

Webb CJ, Simpson MJA. 2001. Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons. Manuka Press, Christchurch. 428 p.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 9 February 2011. Description adapted from Allan (1961) and Webb & Simpson (2001).

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NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/notelaea-apetala/>

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