

Phormium cookianum subsp. cookianum

COMMON NAMES

mountain flax, wharariki

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Monocots

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stout liliaceous herb, 0.6-1(-2) m tall. Leaves numerous, arising from fan-like bases. Individual leaves “paddle-shaped”, erect, stiff, rarely decurved or pendulous 0.6-1(-1.5) x 20-80 mm, glaucous. Lamina margin, entire, somewhat thickened and distinctly pigmented by a dark, rather broad often encircling band 3-5 mm wide. Inflorescence (0.8-1(-2) m tall, somewhat woody and fleshy when fresh, long persistent, drying charcoal grey or black, with the fibrous interior becoming progressively more exposed. Peduncle 20-30 mm diam., inclined, dark red-green, glabrous. Flowers 25-40 mm long, tubular, dull pink or yellow; tips of inner tepals markedly recurved. Ovary erect. Capsules 100-120 mm long, dark green, trigonous in cross-section, pendulous, tapering toward tip, twisted, initially fleshy becoming papery with age, long persistent. Seeds 8-10 x 4-5 mm, black, elliptic, flat and plate-like, margins frilled or twisted.

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinguished from *Phormium tenax* by the pendulous, twisted capsules. Differing from subsp. *hookeri* by the much shorter, broader, erect leaves which have a dark coloured band extending in from the leaf lamina some 3-5 mm, and often encircling the entire leaf blade. Ecologically subsp. *cookianum* seems to be confined to subalpine alpine habitats, where it mainly grows in seepages, along stream sides or on the margins of bogs. Occasionally it is sympatric with subsp. *hookeri*.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Scarce in North Island where only known from high alpine situations in the Tararua Ranges, and possible elsewhere within the central axial ranges. Common in the South Island, in subalpine/alpine situations.

HABITAT

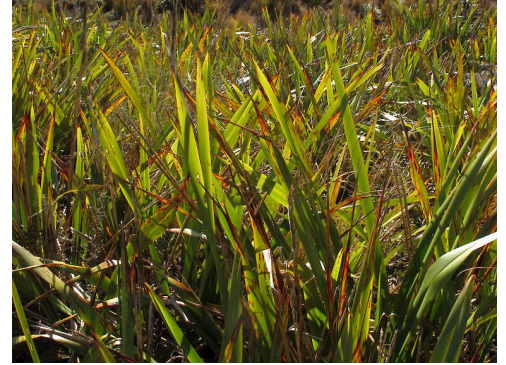
Strictly confined to subalpine, alpine situations.

GENUS

Phormium

FAMILY

Asphodelaceae



Swampy Summit, Dunedin. Photographer: John Barkla, Date taken: 28/07/2012, Licence: CC BY.



Routeburn. Photographer: John Sawyer, Licence: CC BY-NC.

AUTHORITY

Phormium cookianum Le Jol. subsp. cookianum

SYNONYMS

Phormium cookianum Le Jol., Phormium colensoi Hook.f., P. forsterianum nom. nud.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

(September-) October-November (-January)

FRUITING

(November-) December (-March)

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Very easy from fresh seed. Most commonly grown by the division of rooted fans from established plants. Slow to establish and slow growing.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

CULTIVATION

Uncommon in cultivation.

ETYMOLOGY

phormium: Basket or basketwork

cookianum: After Captain Cook

NVS CODE

PHOCSC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 32

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

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.

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): *Phormium cookianum* subsp. *cookianum* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/phormium-cookianum-subsp-cookianum/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/phormium-cookianum-subsp-cookianum/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026