

Phormium cookianum subsp. hookeri

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

Green, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stout liliaceous herb, 1-1.5(-2) m tall. Leaves numerous, arising from fan-like bases. Individual leaves stiff near base and semi-erect, becoming decurved or pendulous from basal third to half of length, 1(-1.5) x 20-80 mm, olive-green to yellow-green. Lamina margin, entire, somewhat thickened and finely pigmented red, orange-red or black. Inflorescence 1(-2) m tall, somewhat woody and fleshy when fresh, long persistent, drying pale grey, with the fibrous interior becoming progressively more exposed. Peduncle 20-30 mm diam., inclined, red-green to grey-green, glabrous. Flowers 25-40 mm long, tubular, greenish or yellow, sometimes flushed orange; tips of inner tepals markedly recurved. Ovary erect. Capsules 100-200 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. *cookianum* by the longer, "floppy" uniformly olive green leaves which lack the dark-pigmented band present on the leaf lamina of subsp. *cookianum*. In the wild this is primarily a plant of cliff faces, boulder fields and talus slopes. It also often grows within grey-scrub. Very rarely it is sympatric with subsp. *cookianum*.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Common throughout New Zealand. Local in Northland. And often found inland on cliff faces and exposed rock ledges in the northern part of its range, becoming the dominant coastal flax south of Paekakariki.

HABITAT

Common from lowland and coastal areas through montane forest to subalpine habitats, usually but not exclusively on cliff faces and open rocky or boulder-strewn ground.

GENUS

Phormium



Eastbourne. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 08/06/2001, Licence: CC BY.



Phormium cookianum subsp. *hookeri* fruits. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FAMILY

Asphodelaceae

AUTHORITY

Phormium cookianum subsp. *hookeri* (Hook.f.) Wardle

SYNONYMS

Phormium hookeri Hook.f.

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.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

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

CULTIVATION

Commonly cultivated. Some colour variants and variegated forms are grown, and some garden centres only stock these.

ETYMOLOGY

phormium: Basket or basketwork

cookianum: After Captain Cook

hookeri: Named after Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker (born 1817) - a world famous botanist who travelled on the Antarctic expedition of 1839 under the command of Sir James Ross and wrote "Handbook of New Zealand Flora" published in 1864-67 describing many specimens sent to Kew by collectors. He died in 1911 and has a memorial stone at Westminster Abbey London.

NVS CODE

PHOHOO

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

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT 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.

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. *hookeri* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.

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

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

25 May 2026