

Pittosporum crassifolium

COMMON NAMES

karo

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Bushy small tree with greyish leathery oval leaves that are white underneath and clusters of small dark red flowers and large hard green fuzzy capsules inhabiting upper North Island. Leaves 5-7cm long, margins often rolled under. Fruit 2-3cm wide, splitting into three to display the black seeds in a yellow pith.

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, Violet/Purple

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

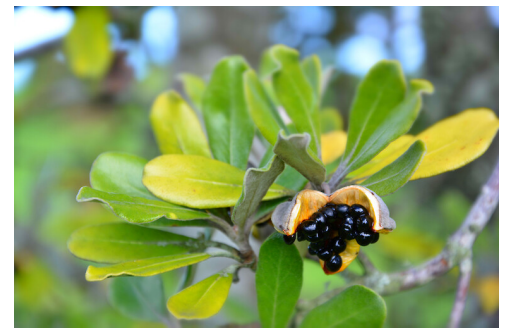
Gynodioecious shrubs to small trees 1-10 m tall. Trunk stout, grey-black, often distinctly lenticillate. Branches and branchlets erect, dark grey-black or brown, immature branchlets densely invested in grey-white or white tomentum, this maturing black. Leaves alternate, usually densely crowded toward branch and branchlet apices. Petioles 4-14 x 1-3 mm, grey-white to grey-black tomentose. Leaves 30-100 x 10-30 mm, obovate to oblanceolate, apices obtuse to acute, base attenuate, margins entire, both surfaces densely white, grey-white or brown tomentose when young, soon glabrate above but remain densely covered in dirty white or grey-white, appressed tomentum beneath, very coriaceous, margins thickened and often strongly revolute, surfaces often blistered with insect galls. Flowers in terminal 1-10-flowered fascicles; pedicels 6-50 mm, accrescent in fruit, tomentose, subtended by a whorl of leaves and numerous, 3-15 mm long, caducous, brown-tomentose, ciliate bud scales. Sepals 7-11 x 1.5-3 mm, oblong to linear-lanceolate, acute, greyish-white, dirty white or brown tomentose on outer surfaces, inner surface only toward the middle, margins ciliate. Petals 10-16 x 3-5 mm, oblanceolate to lanceolate, subacute, free to base, recurved at apices, dark red, purple, yellow, pink or white; stamens 5-9 mm long, anthers 1-3 x 0.5-1.5 mm, sagittiform to elliptic-oblong. Ovary 3-6 x 2-5 mm, white or grey-white tomentose; style 3-2.5 mm long, stigma capitate or 3-lobed truncate. Capsules woody, 10-30 x 10-30 mm, (2-)3(-4)-valved, woody, trigonous, sometimes 2-4-lobed

SIMILAR TAXA

Pittosporum fairchildii Cheeseman is somewhat similar, differing from *P. crassifolium* by its glabrate rather than heavily tomentose foliage and capsules, both being sparsely covered in brownish tomentum. Furthermore the capsules of *P. fairchildii* are green to yellow-green rather than grey-black when mature, somewhat fleshy rather than woody, sparsely covered in brown tomentum rather than densely covered in grey-white tomentum and unlike *P. crassifolium* they scarcely (if ever) open, tending to fall intact from the tree.



Pittosporum crassifolium close up of inconstant male (perfect) flowers, Auckland, Mt Albert, Jesmond Terrace. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Date taken: 28/09/2006, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Meola Reef, Westmere, Auckland. Photographer: John Sawyer, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand, Great Barrier and North Island. In the North indigenous from Te Paki south to about White Cliffs, and East Cape. Widely naturalised further south to Wellington. Naturalised in the South, Stewart and Chatham Islands. Also naturalised on Norfolk Island, and in Hawaii.

HABITAT

Coastal and offshore islands. Favouring steep slopes, cliff faces, boulder beaches, rock stacks and the margins of petrel burrowed land. Sometimes forms major canopy dominant on offshore islands, and on occasion can be a significant component of dune forest. Often an urban weed because its fruits/seeds are avidly taken by indigenous and exotic birds and dispersed widely.

THREATS

Not Threatened. However, the fruits are eaten by rats, and on rodent infested offshore islands this species rarely regenerates.

GENUS

Pittosporum

FAMILY

Pittosporaceae

AUTHORITY

Pittosporum crassifolium Banks et Sol. ex A.Cunn.

SYNONYMS

Pittosporum crassifolium var. *strictum* Kirk

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Plants referred to this species from Raoul Island, in the Kermadecs are an as yet undescribed species, perhaps closest to the Norfolk Island *Pittosporum bracteolatum* Endl. The type of *P. crassifolium* appears to be the same as the later named *Pittosporum ralphii* Kirk. Further research is needed.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

August - October

FRUITING

September - August (Old fruits persist on trees)

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed. Often appears spontaneously in gardens as the seed is distributed far and wide by exotic and indigenous birds. An attractive species popular for its fast growth, robust grey-green leaves, sweetly scented flowers and remarkable resilience in coastal areas. Although frost sensitive, once established it will tolerate moderate frosts and snow fall.

CULTIVATION

Commonly available from most garden centres.

ETYMOLOGY

pittosporum: Pitch seed

crassifolium: From the Latin *crassus* 'thick' and *folius* 'leaf'

NVS CODE

PITCRF

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 24

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.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Cooper, R.C. 1956: The Australian and New Zealand species of Pittosporum. *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden* 43: 87-188

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 30 August 2006. Description adapted from Cooper (1956).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pittosporum-crassifolium/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pittosporum-crassifolium/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026