

Pittosporum fairchildii

COMMON NAMES

Fairchild's kōhūhū

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: CD, IE

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Large shrub bearing dark green leathery leaves that are paler underneath and with large yellow-green capsules inhabiting the Three Kings Islands. Leaves 5-7.5cm long, sparsely covered in white fuzz when young. Fruit 2.5cm wide, splitting into three or four sections to show the dark sticky seeds.

FLOWER COLOURS

Brown, Violet/Purple

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Gynodioecious shrub to small tree 3-6 m tall. Trunk stout, sometimes with 2 or more arising from ground grey-black, lenticillate. Branches erect to spreading, grey-black; branchlets similar clad in grey to brownish-grey tomentum, emergent shoots and immature branchlets white-tomentose, all soon becoming glabrous. Leaves alternate, usually crowded toward branch and branchlet apices. Petioles 3-8 x 0.5-2 mm, white to brown-tomentose. 40-70 x 20-38 mm, dark to light green above, much paler beneath, obovate, elliptic-obovate, elliptic-oblong or oblanceolate, apex obtuse or acute, base acute, margins entire; surfaces white to brown-tomentose when young, soon glabrous above but remaining finely tomentulose below when mature; very coriaceous, sometimes revolute. Flowers in terminal 2-4-flowered fascicles; pedicels 12-20 mm, accrescent in fruit, brown-tomentose, subtended by a whorl of leaves and caducous, ciliate, 5-10 mm long, bud scales. Sepals 4-7 x 2-3.5 mm, lanceolate, acute, brown-tomentose outside, glabrous within, ciliate. Petals 9-14 x 2.5-4.5 mm, lanceolate-oblong, subacute, free, spreading from about half their length, purple, chocolate or white. Stamens 7-8.5 mm, anthers 1.5-2.5 x 0.5-1.3 mm, sagittiform or elliptic-oblong. Ovary 2.5-6 x 2-4 mm, brown-tomentose; style 3-4 mm, stigma capitate or truncate. Capsules 20-25 mm diameter, 3-valved, subglobose, finely brown tomentose, glabrate, smooth to finely rugose; valves green maturing pale yellow, coriaceous to almost fleshy, scarcely opening at maturity. Mucilage bright yellow. Seeds 20-30, black, round.

SIMILAR TAXA

Superficially similar to *Pittosporum crassifolium* but differing by its glabrate mature leaves and capsules, and mainly brownish rather than grey-white tomentum. The glabrate, mature capsules of *P. fairchildii* scarcely open, and are coloured green or yellow-green, while those of *P. crassifolium* are copiously covered in white-grey indumentum, and fully open when mature.



Pittosporum fairchildii fruit and foliage. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Pittosporum fairchildii showing fruits and leaf undersides. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: Three Kings Islands where it is known from North East, Great (Manawa Tawhi), South East and West islands.

HABITAT

Coastal forest and sheltered cliff faces. Usually found in the forest understorey, though on occasion it may grow within open petrel scrub.

THREATS

Not threatened. However, it occupies a rather small geographic area and so qualifies for Range Restricted status.

GENUS

Pittosporum

FAMILY

Pittosporaceae

AUTHORITY

Pittosporum fairchildii Cheeseman

SYNONYMS

None

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

May - September

FRUITING

August - June (may be present throughout the year)

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed which germinates within 6-8 months from sowing. Semi-hardwood cuttings also strike readily. This species readily hybridises with *P. crassifolium* Banks et Sol. ex A.Cunn., so should be planted well away from that species if pure seed is desired. Some nursery lines sold as *P. fairchildii* are in fact this hybrid.

WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available.

ETYMOLOGY

pittosporum: Pitch seed

NVS CODE

PITFAI

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 24

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: CD, IE

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: CD, IE

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

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

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): Pittosporum fairchildii Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.

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

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

25 May 2026