

Pittosporum kirkii

COMMON NAMES

Kirk's kōhūhū, thick-leaved kohukohu

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: PD

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Shrub often growing on other trees and bearing narrow leathery thick leaves that are widest towards the tip and with flattened hard capsules. Leaves 5-10cm long by 2-3cm wide. Flowers yellow, in cluster at tip of twigs. Fruit 2.5-4cm long, splitting into two showing the black seeds in yellow pith.

FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A small, gynodioecious, openly-branched shrub to 4 m tall with stout, purplish branches. Leaves are crowded towards the tips of the branch on 10 mm long stalks. The leaf blade is thick and fleshy, and broadens towards a rounded tip; leaves are 50–100 mm long by 20–30 mm wide. Flowers are either solitary or in clusters of up to four at the tips of branches, bright yellow and appear in November. Fruit are oval, woody capsules up to 40 mm long that split in half to reveal black seeds sitting in yellow sticky pulp, and appear in January.

SIMILAR TAXA

Pittosporum cornifolium, another epiphyte, has leaves that are usually shorter, broader and much thinner, and the inside of the capsules are shiny and bright orange. Kirk's kohuhu could also be confused with Kirks tree daisy (*Brachyglottis kirkii* var. *kirkii*) but that species has white daisy-like flowers and dandelion-like wind-borne seeds.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic to the northern half or the North Island, from Karikari Peninsula south of the northern reaches of the Whanganui River and west to Taranaki Mouna (Mt Egmont National Park).

HABITAT

In dense forest usually epiphytic, in suitable sites free of browsing animals also common on rock outcrops, rubble slopes and in shrubland overlying porous rock.

THREATS

Forest clearance, possum browse.

GENUS

Pittosporum

FAMILY

Pittosporaceae



Foliage. Photographer: Ewen Cameron, Licence: CC BY-NC.



At Mt Kaipawa, Coromandel (December).
Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

AUTHORITY

Pittosporum kirkii Hook.f.

SYNONYMS

None

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October to December

FRUITING

January to May

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed. Can also be grown from semi hardwood cuttings but slow to strike.

ETYMOLOGY

pittosporum: Pitch seed

kirkii: After Thomas Kirk (18 January 1828 - 8 March 1898), a NZ botanist and lecturer in natural sciences and regarded as a leader of botanical enquiry in NZ for over three decades. One of his most significant publications was Forest flora of NZ (1889) but he also contributed over 130 papers to the Transactions and Proceedings of the NZ Institute and other journals.

NVS CODE

PITKIR

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 24

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, PD

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP

2009 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP

2004 | Serious Decline

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: CD, DPS, DPT, NStr, PD, PF, TL
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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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MORE INFORMATION

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

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