Planchonella costata

COMMON NAMES
tawāpou

BIOSTATUS
Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: CD, PD, TO
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Small tree with leathery leaves that are paler underneath and with straight veins radiating from central vein more visible on the upper surface inhabiting coastal forest in the upper North Island. Twig fuzzy. Flowers tiny. Fruit 2.5-4cm long, red ripening to almost black, enclosing 2-4 hard narrow shiny seeds.

FLOWER COLOURS
Green, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Tree up to 18 m. tall; trunk up to 1 m diameter; bark firm (not flaking), greyish-white to grey-brown, finely furrowed; branches numerous, erect and scarcey spreading, closely packed; branchlets clad in appressed hairs and ± lactescent (exuding amilky fluid). Leaves intially pubescent (pubescence comprising fine, matted greyish to grey-brown hairs), lactescent, petioles 8-12 mm long, rather stout and rigid. Lamina 40-150 × 20-50 mm, yellow-green to dark green, elliptic-to obovate-oblong, entire, very coriaceous, adaxially lustrous, when mature glabrous except on abaxial midrib, apex obtuse or retuse, base cuneately narrowed. Lateral veins numerous, set at a rather wide angle to midrib. Flowers axillary and/or cauliflorus, solitary or rarely 2 together, 3.8-6.2 mm diameter; [peduncles 6-12 mm long, rather stout and rigid ± curved; calyx 4(-5)-toothed, teeth narrowly to broadly ovate, pubescent, obtuse; hairs centrally affixed. Corolla greenish to yellow-green, slightly > calyx, deeply 4-5-partite; lobes obovate-oblong, 3.8-4.1 mm. long. Stamens 5, filaments thick; staminodes 5, subulate. Ovary 4-5-loculed. Fruit fleshy, 25-50 mm long, ovoid to ellipsoid, maturing dark purple-black, dark red or orange-yellow. Seeds 1-4, 22-48 mm long, curved, rather hard, testa black, glossy.

SIMILAR TAXA
None



Te Paki. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 22/10/2009, Licence: CC BY.



Rat-gnawed seeds on ground under tawapou trees, Te Huka, Te Paki, Northland. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Date taken: 06/03/1985, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. Norfolk Island and New Zealand where it found in the North Island only from Te Paki south to the Manukau and Coromandel Peninsula after which it occurs in scattered sites as far south as East Cape in the East and Kawhia Harbour in the west. Some of these southerly occurrences are associated with Pa sites, and as the glossy seeds were used as necklaces by Maori it is possible that this species was planted over some parts of its southern North Island range. Tawapou is common on rodent-free offshore islands in the Hauraki Gulf, around the Coromandel Peninsula, Great Barrier Island, and on the Mokohinau, Poor Knights, Hen & Chickens and Three Kings Islands.

HABITAT
Strictly coastal where it is usually a minor (rarely dominant) component of coastal forest on rocky headlands and talus slopes, windswept ridge-lines, forested islands and islets. Usually associated with pohutukawa (Metrosideros excelsa), puriri (Vitex lucens), karaka (Corynocarpus laevigatus), whau (Entelea arborescens), kowhai (Sophora chathamica), tawaroa (the northern wide-leaved form of Beilschmedia tawa) and on offshore islands such as the Three Kings, Poor Knights, Mokohinau Islands with coastal maire (Nestegis apetala), Streblus spp., and Hoheria spp.

GENUS
Planchonella

FAMILY
Sapotaceae

AUTHORITY
Planchonella costata (Endl.) Pierre

SYNONYMS
Achras costata Endl., Pouteria costata (Endl.) Baehni, Planchonella novo-zelandica (F.Muell.) Allan, Achras novozelandica F. Muell.

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September - November

FRUITING
December - June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed, Difficult from cuttings. A frost tender species that makes an excellent specimen tree for northern New Zealand parks and large gardens, and is ideal for planting in street avenues. Can be a little slow to establish in some sites but once it is established it is moderately fast growing, drought tolerant and has a pleasing growth habit. Tawapou can also be used as a hedge - though this spoils its attractive form.

NVS CODE
PLACOS

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 28

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: PD, TO
2012 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: TO
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: CD, DPS, DPT, PF, RF, Rel, TO 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

Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand, Volume I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsida, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Allan (1961) by P. J. de Lange.
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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/planchonella-costata/

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