

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 scarcely spreading, closely packed; branchlets clad in appressed hairs and \pm 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 \times 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 cauliflorous, solitary or rarely 2 together, 3.8-6.2 mm diameter; [peduncles 6-12 mm long, rather stout and rigid \pm 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



Coromandel, March. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Pouteria costata. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. Norfolk Island and New Zealand where it found in the North Island only from Te Pahi 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 *Beilschmiedia 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, H.H. 1961: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. I, Wellington, Government Printer.

ATTRIBUTION

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

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NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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