Podocarpus acutifolius

COMMON NAMES
Westland tōtara, needle-leaved tōtara

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Gymnosperms

FLOWER COLOURS
No flowers



Fruit of Podocarpus acutifolius. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Podocarpus acutifolius. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Shrub or small tree up to 15 m tall. **Trunk** often several (due to suckering from base), main trunk up to 0.4 m diameter breast height. **Bark** somewhat chartaceous, stringy and thin, flaking readily in long or short strips. **Branches** erect, slender up to 9 m. **Branchlets** erect, slender initially densely leafy, leaves shedding along branchlet with age. **Leaves** 15.0–23.0 × 0.75–3.5 mm, dark green to yellow-green, linear, acuminate, pungent, mid-vein indistinct; stomatal lines often conspicuous. **Male strobili** axillary, solitary or up to 4 together on common peduncle 2–3 mm long; peduncle furnished above with 2 narrow-triangular keeled scales and below with 4 ovate scales; strobilus 10–20 mm long; apiculus obtuse. **Ovules** solitary or in pairs on peduncle c.1 mm long; receptacle 2.5–7.0 mm long, red irregularly elliptic-oblong to obovate-oblong, slightly compressed, smooth, swollen (fleshy). **Seeds** solitary or paired, 4.0–5.5 mm long, green when fresh, elliptic to ovate-elliptic, slightly asymmetric, narrow-acuminate, blunt or subacute.

SIMILAR TAXA
Podocarpus acutifolius is superficially similar to *P. totara* var. *waihoensis*—which is is believed to be a hybrid arising from introgression between *P. acutifolius* and *P. totara* var. *totara* (see Wardle 1972). Both tōtara species are occasionally found growing sympatrically or even syntopically. *Podocarpus acutifolius* differs from *P. totara* var. *waihoensis* by its usually smaller shrubby growth habit, much narrow leaves tree habit, and seeds which are elliptic to ovate-elliptic and narrowly beaked (cf. broadly elliptic, shortly and more broadly beaked). From the other totara, *P. acutifolius* differs by the suckering and multi-trunked often shrubby growth habit, much slender branches, narrow-linear leaves, and elliptic to ovate-elliptic, narrowly beaked seeds.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (mostly westerly from the Buller River and adjoining tributaries, west and south to Martins Bay)

HABITAT
Lowland to montane along river flats, in forest or open shrubland and grassland. Often forming dense thickets along active and passive river channels.

GENUS
Podocarpus

FAMILY
Podocarpaceae

AUTHORITY
Podocarpus acutifolius Kirk

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September–November

FRUITING
December–June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from hardwood cuttings and fresh seed. Does well in full sun in a well drained, moist fertile soil. *Podocarpus acutifolius* is moderately fast growing due to its compact, upright branching growth habit makes an excellent hedge. The species is rather variable ranging from large shrubs to small trees and there does seem to be some genetic basis for this. The most commonly cultivated form of it (at least in the North Island) makes a densely branched shrub up to 4 m tall and 2 m wide. Although reasonably drought tolerant, *P. acutifolius* does best in a damp soil, and is an excellent shrub to plant along waterways in urban areas. When planted in mass its fine sharp needles serve as an almost unequalled deterrent to animals and unwanted “visitors”.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FAC: Facultative
Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
podocarpus: Foot or stalk fruit

NVS CODE
PODACU

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 34

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

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 p.
Wardle P. 1972. *Podocarpus totara* var. *waihoensis var. nov.*: the result of introgressive hybridisation between *P. totara* and *P. acutifolius*. *New Zealand Journal of Botany 10(1)*: 195–201. https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.1972.10430218.
Webb CJ, Simpson MJA. 2001. Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons. Manuka Press, Christchurch. 428 p.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 4 January 2012. Description adapted from Allan (1961) and Webb & Simpson (2001).

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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/podocarpus-acutifolius/

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