

Podocarpus totara var. totara

COMMON NAMES

tōtara

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Gymnosperms

FLOWER COLOURS

No flowers

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Robust dioecious conifer up to 30 m tall. **Trunk** stout, 2–3 m diameter, clad in thick, corky, furrowed and somewhat stringy reddish-grey bark; without branches at base, branches stout, erect to spreading. **Leaf bud** narrower than or the same diameter as branchlet, surrounded by caducous, papery, narrowly lanceolate bracts. **Leaves** brownish-green, erect, leathery; juvenile 20 × 1–2 mm, adults 15–30 × 3–4 mm, linear-lanceolate, acute, apex pungent, mid-vein distinct to obscure. **Male cones (strobili)** axillary 10–15 mm, solitary or in 4s. **Female branchlets** axillary, ovules solitary or paired, receptacle of 2–4 scales, acute and free at tips, maturing as a red, swollen, succulent, sweet tasting “fruit” this surmounted by a 1–(2) broadly elliptic, ovoid-oblong 3–6 mm, semi-glossy, buff, grey nut brown, henna or dark brown (green to glaucous-green) when fresh, seed.

SIMILAR TAXA

Most frequently confused with *Podocarpus laetus* with which it may co-occur and with which it frequently hybridises. From that species *P. totara* var. *totara* can be distinguished by its thicker bark, less pungent leaf tips, and most readily by the leaf bud which is the same diameter as the branchlet, and by the narrower, lanceolate bracts surrounding the emergent leaves. See also Gardner (1990).

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island, South Island and Stewart Island/Rakiura. Common throughout most of the North Island and South Island. Present but extremely scarce on Stewart Island/Rakiura (Freshwater River).

HABITAT

Widespread and at times abundant tree of lowland, montane and lower subalpine forest. May also form a vegetation type in which it is the dominant species.

THREATS

Not Threatened, though as a vegetation type it is all but extinct throughout most of its former range.

GENUS

Podocarpus



Fruit with two ovules. Upper Hutt (from material collected by Steve Bloxham). Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 13/02/2014, Licence: CC BY.



Leaf bud. Upper Hutt (from material collected by Steve Bloxham). Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 13/02/2014, Licence: CC BY.

FAMILY

Podocarpaceae

AUTHORITY

Podocarpus totara G.Benn. ex D.Don var. totara

SYNONYMS

Podocarpus totara G.Benn. ex D.Don

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

(August)–October–(December)

FRUITING

Fruits take a year or so to ripen, and may be found throughout the year, usually peaking at about the same time that cones are produced. They are most frequently seen between April and May.

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and hard-wood cuttings.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

CULTURAL USE/IMPORTANCE

The distinctive red, somewhat oily wood was the timber of preference for use by Māori for constructing canoes (waka), and carvings. The stringy bark was harvested to make bags in which to hold preserved birds.

ETYMOLOGY

podocarpus: Foot or stalk fruit

totara: After the Maori name, totara

NVS CODE

PODTOT

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 34

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT 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.

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Otago conservation status information is sourced from the “Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025” Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Gardner R. 1990. Totara and Hall's totara. *Auckland Botanical Society Journal* 45: 27–28.

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Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research. [Year accessed]. Ngā Rauropi Whakaoranga: Māori traditional uses of New Zealand native plants and other organisms. <https://rauopihwakaoranga.landcareresearch.co.nz/>. Accessed [Insert date accessed].

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange for NZPCN (1 June 2013)

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<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/podocarpus-totara-var-totara/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/podocarpus-totara-var-totara/>

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