Prumnopitys taxifolia

COMMON NAMES
mataī, black pine

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Gymnosperms

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
A forest giant conifer up to 25m tall, the trunk has distinctive hammer-mark like texture where the bark has flaked off, a timber which was historically used in house building particularly hardwood flooring. The foliage is paler yellow-green to light yellow when young maturing to rich green when mature, the needles are flattened and attached at several angles about 15 × 2 mm. The fleshy fruit is a drupe, it is a purple-black sphere when ripe with a tough woody seed within.



Photo of tree bark. Photographer: Department of Conservation, Licence: Public domain.

FLOWER COLOURS
No flowers


Whirinaki, May. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Dioecious conifer 25–(30) m tall. **Trunk** 1–2 m diam. **Bark** dark brown (almost black), falling in thick circular flakes, leaving a distinctive hammer-like scar patterning on trunk. **Wood** dark brown to rich yellow-brown, very hard. **Juveniles** filiramulate, with distinctive, dark brown, slender, flexuous, divarciating branchlets. **Leaves** of juvenile plants brown, pale yellow, or dirty white, 5–10 × 1–2 mm, linear-lanceolate, apex acute; adult leaves dark green, somewhat glaucous above, glaucous below, 10–15 × 1–2 mm, subdistichous, linear, straight to subfalcate, obtuse, often apiculate. **Male cones (strobili)** in spikes, 30–50 mm long, with 10–30 cones per spike. **Ovules** on short axillary branches, 3–10 per 40 mm long spike. **Fruit** a fleshy, oily, aromatic, terpene-tasting, purple-black drupe with a glaucous bloom. **Stone** more or less circular (5.5)–6–8.5 mm diam., surface dull to semi-glossy, pale orange-yellow to light orange-yellow.

SIMILAR TAXA
Easily recognised by the distinctive filiramulate divaricating juvenile to subadult growth form, charcoal grey hammered bark, dark green to glaucous adult foliage, spicate male cones, and by the ovoid, plum-coloured drupes.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. Te Ika-a-Māui | North Island, Te Waipounamu | South Island and Rakiura | Stewart Island (uncommon).

HABITAT
Lowland forest. Often in drier climates, where it can dominate alluvial soils which are waterlogged/flooded in winter and dry in summer. Seems to prefer base-rich substrates and soils.

THREATS
Not Threatened, although as a forest-type it has been greatly reduced through widespread logging. Very few intact examples of mataī-dominated forest remain in the country.

GENUS
Prumnopitys

FAMILY
Podocarpaceae

AUTHORITY
Prumnopitys taxifolia (D.Don) de Laub.

SYNONYMS
Dacrydium taxifolium Banks et Solander ex D.Don in Lamb., Dacrydium mai A.Cunn., D. mayi Houtte. ex Gord., Podocarpus matai Lamb. Ex Hook.f., Prumnopitys spicata Kent in Veitch, Stachycarpus spicatus (Mirbel) Masters, Podocarpus taxifolia

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
(October)–November–February

FRUITING
Fruits take 12–18 months to mature. Ripe fruits may be found throughout the year.

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed. Seed may take up to 2 years to germinate Can be grown from hard-wood cuttings but rather slow to strike.

CULTURAL USE/IMPORTANCE
Gum from the trunk is the basis for “mataī beer”, a deep, rich brew still made in some parts of the country. The dark, hard, durable timber is much sought after for floors and furniture.

CULTIVATION
Commonly cultivated and frequently sold by most commercial nurseries and outlets—usually from plants raised from seed, however some nurseries stock cutting grown plants raised from adult foliage, thus bypassing the filiramulate, divaricating juvenile growth-form. A very popular garden tree.

ETYMOLOGY
prumnopitys: From the Greek prymnos ‘hindmost’ or ‘stern’ and pitys ‘pine’, referring to the location of the resin duct

NVS CODE
PRUTAX

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 38

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
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The 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 At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPS, Rel, Sp Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The Otago conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025" Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.
Northland: 2026 | Regionally Not Threatened Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The Northland conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation status of indigenous vascular plants in Northland | Taitokerau" Ford et al. 2026 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 p.

ATTRIBUTION

Prepared by P.J. de Lange for NZPCN, 3 February 2006. Description based on Allan (1961)
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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/prumnopitys-taxifolia/

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