Pseudopanax ferox

COMMON NAMES
fierce lancewood

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Small tree with a striking juvenile form consisting of down pointing roundish long narrow very tough leaves that have irregular blunt bumps along the edge which grows into a bushy small tree bearing long narrow leathery leaves that have a few teeth on the margin towards the tip and produces 8-9mm wide purple fruit.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Gynodioecious small tree up to 8 m tall. Trunk slender, longitudinally deeply grooved and ridged, bark fawn, mottled grey-white, often finely encrusted with lichens. Seedling leaves patent, 15-40 x 3-6 mm, dark or light chocolate brown to almost black, linear-lanceolate, margins deeply lobed with hooked ends; sapling and unbranched juvenile leaves strongly deflexed, 100-500 x 6-15 mm, light brown mottled with fawn and white near lobes or dark chocolate brown, mottled with fawn and white near lobes, coriaceous, very thick and rigid, margins set with closely-spaced to more or less distant, broadly and broad-based, somewhat raised, rounded, prominently and sharply hooked lobes; midrib raised, 2 mm wide, leaf apex terminating in 2-6 crowded, hooked lobes; leaves at branching stage similar but shorter, sub- to ascending, sometimes more deeply and sharply lobed before passing into adult foliage. Adult leaves 50-150 x 10-20 mm, dark or light chocolate brown, oblong to linear-obovate or broadly lanceolate, narrowing to a stout petiole 10-20 mm long; apex obtuse or mucronate-apiculate, retuse, bluntly serrate to entire, veins evident above. Umbels terminal, compound, staminate and perfect umbels with 5-12 rays, 30-50 mm long; flowers more or less racemosely distributed, trending to umbellules in perfect flowers; pistillate with rays 10-30 mm long, umbellules 2-5-flowered. Stamens 4-5, ovary 5-loculed, 5-ovuled; style branches 5, fused, sometimes free at tips. Fruit 8-9 mm diameter, brown or purple-brown, ovoid, fleshy.

SIMILAR TAXA
Pseudopanax crassifolius is similar but the sapling and subadult leaves are green to dark green, usually with smaller, narrow-based, straight teeth, and the adult has much broader, greener, elliptic-cuneate, lanceolate to linear-obovate, acute or obtuse, entire to sinuate or rarely coarsely serrated leaves. P. crassifolius is a much larger tree reaching up to 20 m in good conditions.

Auckland University ex unknown provenance.
Photographer: Bec Stanley, Licence: CC BY-SA.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North and South Islands. In the North rather patchy, known from Ahipara, Woodhill Forest (South Kaipara), the Moawhango and southern Rimutaka Range. In the S. Island more widespread but easterly from the Marlborough Sounds to Southland.

HABITAT
Coastal to subalpine (10-800 m a.s.l.) on consolidated sand dunes (dune forest), in grey scrub overlying pumice, on recent alluvial (coarse gravels), limestone outcrops, boulder fall, cliff faces, talus slopes and scarps. Also found as a sparse component of seasonally drought-prone but otherwise cold and wet alluvial forests. This species prefers drier habitats and conditions than P. crassifolius (Sol. ex A.Cunn.) C.Koch.

THREATS
Probably warrants a higher threat listing. P. ferox is biologically sparse but it is also threatened by possum, deer and goat browse, because juvenile plants command high prices in the nursery trade accessible populations have and continue to be plundered for seedlings and ripe fruit. Hybridisation with P. lessonii (DC.) K.Koch has been reported from several northern populations, if substantiated, the long-term effect hybridism may have on the viability of P. ferox at these sites has yet to be evaluated. The most secure populations seem to be the one in the southern North Island and a few island populations in the Marlborough Sounds and those in the more remote parts of the south-eastern South Island.

GENUS
Pseudopanax

FAMILY
Araliaceae

AUTHORITY
Pseudopanax ferox Kirk

SYNONYMS
Panax ferox Kirk

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
Yes

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
November - April

FRUITING
December - June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed and can be struck from semi-hardwood cuttings - though necessarily of adult foliage. A very tough plant that favours highly fertile but dry soils in full sun to dappled light. It can tolerate poor fertility soils as well and is drought tolerant. Juvenile foliage is exceptional and so it is well known from cultivation.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

UPL: Obligate Upland
Rarely is a hydrophyte, almost always in uplands (non-wetlands).

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for May 2008 for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

pseudopanax: False cure
ferox: From the Latin ferox 'fierce', usually referring to very spiny plants

NVS CODE

PSEFER

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 48

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: PD, Sp
2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: PD, Sp
2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: CD, RF
2004 | Sparse
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: CD, DPS, DPT, DE, PF, RR, RF 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 Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: NR, NStr, PF, Sp, TL 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.

ATTRIBUTION

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

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/pseudopanax-ferox/

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25 May 2026