**Rhopalostylis sapida**

**COMMON NAME**
nīkau

**SYNONYMS**
None

**FAMILY**
Arecales

**AUTHORITY**
Rhopalostylis sapida H.Wendl. et Drude

**FLORA CATEGORY**
Vascular – Native

**ENDEMIC TAXON**
Yes

**ENDEMIC GENUS**
No

**ENDEMIC FAMILY**
No

**STRUCTURAL CLASS**
Trees & Shrubs - Monocotyledons

**NVS CODE**
RHOSAP

**CHROMOSOME NUMBER**
2n = 32

**CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS**
2012 | Not Threatened

**PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES**
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION**
Palm to 15m tall with a ringed trunk and 3m long erect leaves inhabiting lowland forest south to Okarito and Banks Peninsula and the Chatham Islands. Leaves with multiple narrow leaflets to 1m long closely-spaced along central stem. Flowers pinkish, in multiple spikes at the top of trunk. Fruit red.

**DISTRIBUTION**
Endemic. North Island, South Island from Marlborough Sounds and Nelson south to Okarito in the west and Banks Peninsula in the east. Also on Chatham and Pitt Islands. However Chatham Islands plants have a distinctly juvenile form, larger fruits, and thicker indumentum on the fronds.

**HABITAT**
Primarily a species of coastal to lowland forest in the warmer parts of New Zealand.
FEATURES
Trunk up to 15 m, stout, covered in grey-green leaf scars, otherwise green. Crownshaft 0.6(-1) m long, dark green, smooth, bulging. Fronds up to 3 m long; leaflets to 1 m, closely set (sometimes over lapping), ascending. Spathes c.300 x 150 mm., between pink and yellow, caducous. Inflorescence shortly stalked, with many branches, 200-400 mm long. Flowers sessile, unisexual, tightly packed, lilac to pink. Males in pairs, caducous, stamens 6. Females solitary, with minute staminodes, ovary 1-locular, stigmas terminal, recurved, persistent. Fruit c.10 x 7 mm, elliptic-oblong, flesh red.

SIMILAR TAXA
Rhopalostylis baueri (Seem.) H.Wendl. et Drude, which differs mainly by its globose to oval fruits, and from most populations of R. sapida, by the broader leaflets. Both species of Rhopalostylis are very similar and research is needed.

FLOWERING
November - April

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink

FRUITING
February - November

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easy from seed. Fruit should be soaked for a few days in water and then lightly scrubbed to clear the flesh, then place in sealed plastic bags in half shade until seed begins to germinate. Plant germinating seed in deep, narrow pots. Avoid disturbing the roots as much as possible. An excellent pot plant, and provided the tap root is left intact it can be easily transplanted. Quite hardy. Very variable in the wild, so could benefit from critical horticultural selection.

ETYMOLOGY
rhopalostylis: Club style
sapida: Savoury

WHERE TO BUY
Commonly sold by most retail plant nurseries.

TAXONOMIC NOTES
The palm on the Chatham Islands is probably distinct from R. sapida but further research is required.

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

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION
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MORE INFORMATION