

# Rhopalostylis sapida

## COMMON NAME

Nikau palm

## SYNONYMS

None

## FAMILY

Arecaceae

## 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 distinct juveniel 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.



Trunk of nikau. Photographer: Wayne Bennett



Rimutaka Forest Park. Jul 2002. Photographer: Jeremy Rolfe

## 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

Esler, A.E. 1969. Leaf fall and flowering of nikau. Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin, 36: 19-22

Greenwood, R.M. 1969. Notes on growth of young nikau plants. Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin, 36: 22-23

## CITATION

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## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/rhopalostylis-sapida/>