

Rubus cissoides

COMMON NAMES

tātarāmoa, bush lawyer

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Lianes & Related Trailing Plants - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Prickly vine with compound, leathery, hairless leaves, leaflets 3-5 leathery, margins serrated, veins, petiolules, petioles and young stems armed in red prickles. Flowers in much-branched panicles, white. Fruits numerous, orange-red to red.

FLOWER COLOURS

White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Much-branched dioecious vine or scrambling vine with stems up to 10 m or more long. Primary stems up to 150 mm diameter, terete, more or less glabrous (when young sparsely covered in minute stalked glands); mature branches unarmed, otherwise branchlets covered with stout, falcate reddish prickles. Stipules narrow-linear. Leaves palmate or ternate, evenly and usually sharply serrate, coriaceous, glabrate, leaflets of juveniles up to 5, otherwise mature plants with 3-5, veins usually distinct, petioles and petiolules usually armed with recurved prickles, stipules narrow-linear; lamina of leaflets varying with range, those of northern North Island populations 70-150 × 3-10 mm, usually narrow linear-lanceolate, acuminate, base truncate (rarely shallowly cordate); those of southern North Island 60-150 × 20-30 mm, usually ovate-lanceolate, acute to acuminate, rarely obtuse, base subcordate; those of South Island 60-150 × 30-60 mm, broadly ovate-oblong to oblong, acute to acuminate, rarely obtuse, base truncate to oblique at base. Inflorescence a much-branched panicle up to 800 mm long, branchlets and pedicels glandular-pubescent. Flowers white (rarely cream). Sepals pubescent, pale-margined, ovate-oblong, obtuse, 3-5 mm long. Petals 5, 5-8 mm long, ovate, oblong or obovate. Male flowers with numerous stamens. Style absent or rudimentary. Female flowers without stamens, or if present these sparse and rudimentary. Fruits up to 12 mm diameter, drupelets 10-15 (or more), orange-red to red. Endocarp ('seed') 1.6-2.7 mm long, dorsally-ridged 1(-3)x.

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinguished from introduced *Rubus* (blackberries, raspberries wineberries etc) by the smaller flowers, usually palmate or ternate leaves, and the lack of long glandular bristly hairs on the young stems. From other indigenous *Rubus* (bush lawyers) can be distinguished by the reddish prickles, and by the leaves which are hairless (glabrous) or almost so on their undersides, and smooth above (never bullate)



Eastern Hutt hills. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 02/10/2005, Licence: CC BY.



Young leaves. Boulder Hill, Lower Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 02/03/2013, Licence: CC BY.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North, South, Stewart Islands

HABITAT

Coastal to montane. Usually in forest but also found in scrub, and on the margins of wetlands.

GENUS

Rubus

FAMILY

Rosaceae

AUTHORITY

Rubus cissoides A.Cunn.

SYNONYMS

Rubus australis var. cissoides (A.Cunn.) Hook.f.

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Rubus cissoides is a variable species (Allan 1961; Webb et al. 1988) and at least three races can be recognised. These have a geographic basis. The type is from Northland, and those plants can be distinguished from the other races within *R. cissoides* by their palmate leaves, and juvenile plants whose leaflets are narrowly lanceolate to almost linear. From about the Central North Island south to Wellington another race appears which usually has ternate leaves, and the leaflets are rather broadly ovate with truncate bases (this race may also be in the northern South Island). In the South Island another race occurs that has palmate-ternate leaves of variable shape (though never linear or narrowly lanceolate) and with truncate, cordate to oblique leaflet bases. These races are well defined and probably merit some level of taxonomic recognition.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

September - November

FRUITING

December - April

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from layered stems and semi-hardwood cuttings. Flourished when planted in damp ground in a well-lighted situation. Not often grown on account of its prickly stems - but nevertheless an attractive plant. The fruits though edible are insipid.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

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

ETYMOLOGY

rubus: From the Latin meaning bramble

cissoides: Ivy-like

NVS CODE

RUBCIS

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 28

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

Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand, Volume I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsidea, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085 p.

Webb CJ, Sykes WR, Garnock-Jones PJ 1988: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. IV. Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch.

Webb CJ, Simpson MJA. 2001. *Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons*. Christchurch, Manuka Press.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 17 October 2016. Description based on Allan (1961), Webb et al. (1988) and Webb & Simpson (2001).

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/rubus-cissoides/>

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