

Schinus terebinthifolia

COMMON NAMES

Christmas berry, Brazilian pepper tree

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Evergreen bushy shrub up to 3m high. Leaves are pinnate with 9-13 subsessile (without leaf stalk) leaflets, terminal leaflet to 8 by 2.5 cm, deep shining green, entire or with fine teeth, conspicuous very pale veins and midrib. Inflorescence is a pannicle of white flowers 3-4 mm across. The fruit is a globose bright red berry 4-6 mm across.

FLOWER COLOURS

Cream, White, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Leaves pinnate, alternate, 8 - 17 cm long. Pinnae 4-6 (11) rounded and often toothed lateral leaflets, arranged in pairs along a narrowly winged leaf axis with a single, terminal leaflet. Leaves pungent when crushed with a peppery smell. Flowers in many branched panicles, 2-11 cm long, in upper leaf axils. Dioecious flowers borne on pedicels, 1 mm long with 5 small, green, triangular sepals with ciliate margins; 5 small, white, glabrous, ovate petals; 10 stamens concentrically arranged in 2 series of 5, the outer series being longer; a lobed disc at the base of the stamens; and a single-chambered, or unilocular, ovary with 3 short styles. However, in male flowers, the ovary, or pistillode, is non-functional, and in female flowers, the staminodes are sterile. On female trees, flowering is followed by the production of bright red, fleshy, spherical drupes 5-6mm in diameter, containing a single seed.

SIMILAR TAXA

Another *Schinus* species, pepper tree (*S. molle*) is commonly grown and occasionally naturalises. It can be distinguished by the drooping branchlets and narrower leaflets

DISTRIBUTION

Scattered in Auckland also records from Northland and Waikato.

HABITAT

Currently in waste areas, but a problem weed of wetland and water body margins overseas.

GENUS

Schinus

FAMILY

Anacardiaceae

AUTHORITY

Schinus terebinthifolia Raddi



Schinus terebinthifolius fruits (adult wild tree), New North Road, Mt Albert, Auckland.
Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Date taken: 25/04/2006, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Schinus terebinthifolius. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

TAXONOMIC NOTES

The spelling of the species epithet is correct as per Zona (2015).

FLOWERING

Late summer

FRUITING

Autumn

YEAR NATURALISED

1995

ORIGIN

Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental tree

TOLERANCES

Serious weed in subtropical areas, may be too cold for it to be a serious problem in NZ. Alleopathic. Casts deep shade and excludes understorey. Dane Panetta considers this species to be a major ecological weed in Australia and recommends NZ consider it so as well (October 1996).

CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Not controlled in New Zealand.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Bird and mammal dispersed seed, suckering from planted trees.

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the [MPI website](#).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

GISD database (<http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=22>)

Webb, C.J.; Sykes, W.R.; Garnock-Jones, P.J. (1988). Flora of New Zealand Volume 4: Naturalised pteridophytes, gymnosperms, dicotyledons. Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch.

Heenan, P.B.; de Lange, P.J.; Cameron, E.K.; Champion, P.D. (2002). Checklist of dicotyledons, gymnosperms and pteridophytes naturalised or casual in New Zealand: additional records 1999-2000. New Zealand Journal of Botany 40: 155-174.

Zona, S. 2015: The correct gender of *Schinus* (Anacardiaceae). *Phytotaxa* 222(1): 75-77.

ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet [prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA)].

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/schinus-terebinthifolia/>

PDF DATE

07 June 2026