

Shawia fragrantissima

COMMON NAMES

fragrant tree daisy

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: PD

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Small bushy shrub with many erect reddish brown zig-zagging twigs and sweet smelling small flowers inhabiting coastal areas from Banks Peninsula to Invercargill. Leaves 7.5-30mm long by 5-10mm wide, pointed, hairy when young. Flowers yellow, in small tight clusters. Seeds fuzzy.

FLOWER COLOURS

Orange, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Small semi-deciduous tree up to 8 m tall. Trunk stout, up to 0.6 m d.b.h., clad in greyish-brown bark, this long persistent peeling in long flaking strips. Branches dark reddish brown ascending to spreading; branchlets reddish-brown to red, rigidly wiry, flexuous (often zig-zagging), interlacing, striate. Petioles up to 3 mm long, red-brown. Leaves alternate, 7.5-40 x 5-15 mm, yellow-green to bright green, elliptic-oblong, elliptic-ovate or broad-ovate to obovate, apex obtuse to acute, base cuneate to attenuate; lamina membranous, upper surface glabrate to glabrous when mature, undersides clad in soft, white tomentum, margins flat, entire. Inflorescences axillary (never terminal) in sessile to subsessile glomerules up to 20 mm diameter, each bearing up to 12 bracteate capitula. Capitula 2-4 mm diameter, strongly fragrant (especially at night); involucre bracts bi- to triseriate, oblong under sides copiously white-tomentose; florets 4-8, pale yellow to orange-yellow, ray-florets 1.5-2 x 1.5-2 mm, pale yellow. Cypsela 2 mm long, slightly compressed, grooved, finely and sparsely pilose hairy; pappus 2-3 mm long, pale yellow to buff.

SIMILAR TAXA

Shawia hectorii is somewhat similar but this species has opposite, broadly-elliptic, grey-green leaves that are finely hairy on both surfaces. It usually forms a much larger tree (up to 10 m tall), has distinctive deeply furrowed, long persistent grey to greyish-white bark, and branchlets are never flexuous and interlacing. In lowland areas *Shawia hectorii* tends to grow on poorly drained alluvial soils.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic, eastern and south-eastern South Island from Banks Peninsula to Southland.

HABITAT

coastal to lower montane (0-300 m a.s.l.) usually in grey scrub, on forest margins or shrublands. Sometimes on the margins of estuarine or saltmarsh vegetation in places which would be subject to saline water in extremes of tide, also found on gravelly soils often on the margins of steep gullies, gorges and in boulder field.



Inflorescence, in cultivation, Southland.
Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Date taken: 04/11/2019, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Abaxial leaf surface, in cultivation, Southland.
Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Date taken: 04/11/2019, Licence: CC BY-NC.

THREATS

A rather widespread species which can be locally common but is more usually sparsely distributed over large parts of its known range. Although threatened in some areas this species does seem to be recruiting naturally at many locations and populations tend to have good age class structure.

GENUS

Shawia

FAMILY

Asteraceae

AUTHORITY

Shawia fragrantissima (Petrie) Saldivia & Nicol

SYNONYMS

Olearia fragrantissima Petrie

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October - February

FRUITING

November - April

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from semi-hardwood cuttings that are best taken in autumn and held in a cold frame, and from fresh seed (seed has short-term viability). Seed responds well to 5-10 days cold treatment prior to sowing. An attractive shrub or small tree for the garden. very tolerant of a range of conditions and once established drought tolerant. The deliciously apricot-peach scented flowers are rather notable and unique to this species.

CULTIVATION

Occasionally sold by specialist native plant nurseries.

ETYMOLOGY

shawia: After Thomas Shaw (1694-1751), English scholar and traveller.

fragrantissima: Deliciously scented

NVS CODE

OLEFRA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 108

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: PD

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: PD

2009 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: CD, PD

2004 | Sparse

Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: DPT, NR, NStr, PD, 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.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Heads, M. 1998. Biodiversity in the New Zealand divaricating tree daisies: *Olearia* sect. nov. (Compositae). Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society 127(3): 239-285.

Saldivia, P.; Nicol, D.A. 2025: Reinstatement, broader circumscription, and infrageneric classification of *Shawia* (Astereae, Celmisiinae), a large woody genus endemic to Australasia. *Phytoneuron* 49: 1–43.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for the NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2006. Description adapted from Heads (1998).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Shawia fragrantissima* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/shawia-fragrantissima/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/shawia-fragrantissima/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026