

Sophora fulvida

COMMON NAME

kōwhai

SYNONYMS

Sophora microphylla var. *fulvida* Allan; *Sophora microphylla* subsp. *microphylla* var. *fulvida* (Allan) Yakovlev

FAMILY

Fabaceae

AUTHORITY

Sophora fulvida (Allan) Heenan et de Lange

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

SOPFUL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 18

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon

2004 | Gradual Decline

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

A kowhai tree bearing leaves to 140mm long that have equal-sized small yellowish-hairy leaflets 1.8-7.5 long and with bunches of drooping yellow flowers and dry ridged and knobby seed pods 60-190mm long containing hard yellow seeds. Juvenile and adults similar. Occurring north of Raglan.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic to New Zealand, occurring in Northland, Auckland and the Waikato. The southern limit occurs at Mt Karioi on the south side of Raglan Harbour.

HABITAT

Open or disturbed sites, on base-rich volcanic rock, rubble and outcrops, amongst mixed podocarp-hardwood forest.

FEATURES

A small kowhai tree to 10 m tall. It has many hairy, small, crowded, yellow-green or grey leaflets. Young branches are also hairy, and juvenile plants do not divaricate. Leaves on adults are up to 140 mm long and bear 60-90, roughly elliptical leaflets, each 1.8 to 7.5 by 1.2 to 4.5 mm. The larger juvenile leaves are almost devoid of hairs, also elliptical in shape and range in size from 2 to 3 by 4 to 6 mm. Flowers are yellow.



In cultivation, Christchurch. Photographer: Jeremy Rolfe



Sophora fulvida. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth

SIMILAR TAXA

Sophora microphylla, *S. chathamica*, *S. godleyi* and *S. tetraptera* could be confused with *S. fulvida*. These all tend to have fewer leaflets on each leaf, and leaflets which are often larger, broader, crowded and sometimes overlapping or widely spaced.

FLOWERING

Flowering occurs from October to November.

FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

FRUITING

Fruiting in April–May.

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from seed. The hard seed coat should be lightly nicked or sanded to expose the endosperm. Soaking seed in water overnight before sowing often improves the germination success rate. Can be grown from cuttings but these are usually very slow and hard to strike.

THREATS

Competition from weeds, especially on rocky outcrops; animal browse and loss of habitat.

ETYMOLOGY

sophora: After the Arabic name for a similar tree

fulvida: Yellow

WHERE TO BUY

Commonly sold by commercial nurseries - usually as *S. microphylla* var. *fulvida*.

POISONOUS PLANT

All parts of the plant but especially the ripe yellow seed are poisonous. Because the seed are hard they will take a lot of chewing to cause harm. If the seed are crushed before eating it is more likely that they will cause harm. The major toxin is Cytisine and symptoms of poisoning include nausea, vomiting, increased heart rate, twitching of muscles or loss of coordination. Onset of these symptoms may occur within one hour. In extreme cases symptoms include paralysis and respiratory failure. Click on this link for more information about [Poisonous native plants](#).

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 1 August 2003. Description based on Heenan et al. (2001).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Heenan, P.B.; de Lange, P. J.; Wilton, A. D. 2001: *Sophora* (Fabaceae) in New Zealand: taxonomy, distribution, and biogeography. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 39(1): 17-53.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/sophora-fulvida/>