

# Sophora fulvida

## COMMON NAMES

kōwhai

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

## SIMPLIFIED 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.

## FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

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.

## 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.

## 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.

## THREATS

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

## GENUS

*Sophora*

## FAMILY

Fabaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Sophora fulvida* (Allan) Heenan et de Lange



In cultivation, Christchurch. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Licence: CC BY.



Seedling-grown, from seed collected on coastal sea cliff, Cornwallis, Manukau Harbour, collected 23Jan21. Young shoots very fulvous. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Date taken: 27/10/2023, Licence: Public domain.

## SYNONYMS

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

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

Flowering occurs from October to November.

## 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.

## CULTIVATION

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](#).

## PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for January 2012](#) for the full story.

## ETYMOLOGY

**sophora:** After the Arabic name for a similar tree

**fulvida:** Yellow

## NVS CODE

SOPFUL

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 18

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon

2004 | Gradual Decline

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, NStr, TL 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.

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Heenan PB, de Lange PJ, Wilton AD. 2001. *Sophora* (Fabaceae) in New Zealand: taxonomy, distribution, and biogeography. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 39(1): 17-53.

## ATTRIBUTION

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

## NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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## MORE INFORMATION

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

## PDF DATE

27 May 2026