

Melicytus crassifolius

COMMON NAME

thick-leaved mahoe

SYNONYMS

Hymenanthera crassifolia Hook.f.

FAMILY

Violaceae

AUTHORITY

Melicytus crassifolius (Hook.f.) F.Muell.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

MELCRA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 64

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | At Risk – Declining

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | At Risk – Declining

2009 | At Risk – Declining

2004 | Sparse

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Rigid dense small hard shrub with many thick tapering grey speckled branches bearing clusters of upward-pointing small dark green oval leaves mainly inhabiting coastal areas. Leaves thick, variable, about 1-2cm long, widest near the middle. Flowers inconspicuous, bell-shaped, underneath branches. Fruit white, usually with purple patches.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North and South Islands. In the North present from Cape Turnagain and Paekakariki south to Cape Palliser and Te Rawhiti, also on the smaller near shore islands as well as Kapiti and Mana Islands. In the S. Island in the Marlborough Sounds east and south to about Kaikoura (exact limits unclear).

HABITAT

Coastal to lowland (0-300 m a.s.l.). Usually coastal in open grey scrub, on talus and alluvial terraces, cobble beaches, cliff faces, and in coarse stable sand dunes (especially swales). Inland it may be found in open grassland, amongst kanuka stands (*Kunzea ericoides* (A.Rich.) Joy Thoms s.l.) and along river flats.



At Wellington Coast (September).

Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Eastbourne, Wellington Harbour. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 08/06/2001, Licence: CC BY.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Dioecious, stout, heavily branched, very bushy and leafy, spreading shrub up to 2 x 2 m (usually much less). Trunk 1-4 arising from ground, up to 100 mm d.b.h., bark orange-green to green, grey to grey-white in exposed situations, finely lenticellate. Branches numerous at first erect to suberect, soon spreading often decurved and touching the ground; branchlets more or less intertwined, filiramate, weakly divaricate; puberulent becoming glabrous, stout, flexuous tapering toward apex, not spinous at tips. Petioles 2-4 mm long, yellow-green to green, fleshy to fleshy-coriaceous. Leaves solitary on young rapidly growing branchlets, otherwise in dense fascicles, often on short shoots; lamina 5-20 x 3-70 mm, dark green, narrowly obovate-oblong, spatulate to elliptic, apex obtuse or retuse, cuneately narrowed to base; margins more or less revolute, usually entire very rarely with 1-2 assymmetric lobes, somewhat thicker than the rest of lamina. Flowers c.3 mm diameter, solitary or in 2-3-flowered fascicles; yellow-green. Pedicels bracteate, curved to recurved, rarely straight 1.5-2 mm long. Sepals green, suborbicular, with fimbriate margins; petals 5, c. 3 mm long, pale green to lemon-yellow, narrow-oblong, recurving from apex to base. Anthers 5, sessile, fused at base and joined by a fine 5-partite membrane, divisions more or less triangular; nectariferous scales broad. Style bifid. Fruit a berry 3.5 mm, fleshy white or greenish-white, often with a faint glaucous bloom, broadly cylindrical to subglobose; seeds (1-)2, ovate to ovate-elliptic.

SIMILAR TAXA

This is part of a species complex. The description here is of plants found in lowland and coastal portions of the southern North Island and coastal eastern Marlborough, which encompasses the type. In the broad sense it is most likely to be confused with *M. obovatus* from which it can be distinguished by its narrower leaves, lower stature and more intertwined and spreading branches and usually lemon-yellow flowers. Along the Wellington coastline and eastern Marlborough Sounds the form of *M. obovatus* found there also differs from *M. crassifolius* by its perfect rather than dioecious flowering habit.

FLOWERING

August - January

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow

FRUITING

October - May

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and can be grown from semi-hardwood cuttings. An attractive and very hardy shrub ideal for windy situations. Very drought tolerant once established. Does best in open, sunny, free draining soils.

THREATS

Heavily browsed by cattle, horses, sheep, possums, rabbits and hares wherever accessible. Otherwise reasonably common though often sparsely distributed over large parts of its range. Recruitment is often lacking in populations accessible to browsing animals.

ETYMOLOGY

melicytus: From the Greek meli (honey) and kytos (hollow container), referring to the staminal nectaries of the flowers. Literally "honey-cave"

crassifolius: From the Latin crassus 'thick' and folius 'leaf'

NOTES ON TAXONOMY

All the small-leaved *Melicytus* are the subject of an ongoing taxonomic revision. *M. crassifolius* includes several potentially unnamed species, particularly in the South Island. Once described *M. crassifolius* will probably have an even more restricted distribution.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange for NZPCN (1 June 2013)

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/melicytus-crassifolius/>