

# Hoheria populnea

## COMMON NAMES

lacebark, houhere, ribbonwood

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

## SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Soft-wooded tree with a grey trunk bearing leathery toothed leaves and large white flowers that develop into a winged dry fruit inhabiting the northern North Island. Leaves 7-14cm long by 4-6 cm wide, widest at base. Juvenile plants with zigzagging branches bearing leaves only 1-3 cm long with deep gaps between teeth.

## FLOWER COLOURS

White

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Small upright to often spreading tree up to 8 m tall (rarely more); bark of mature trunk and branches dark grey-brown that of younger growth dark red-brown or maroon, branches and branchlets ascending, in some forms pendulous, pliant, slender, often deeply grooved, ± glabrescent, indumentum comprised of short stellate hairs, on mature parts sparse, on young parts and inflorescence sparse to dense. Juvenile foliage identical or nearly so to adult. Leaves subcoriaceous to coriaceous glossy, adaxially dark-green to yellow-green, sometimes with veins more darkly pigmented, abaxially often maroon or purple with darker coloured veins, sometimes green or glaucescent; petioles slender, pliant up to 10 mm long; lamina (5-)10(-30) mm long, broad-ovate to deltoid to suborbicular in outline, margins serrate, usually deeply so, coarsely lobed. Adult leaves similar, on petioles up to 20 mm long; lamina (50-)7(-180) mm × (30-)40(-60) mm, broad-ovate to ovate-lanceolate to elliptic, apex acuminate or acute, obtuse or rounded, base rounded to truncate (rarely subcordate); margins deeply, coarsely, sometimes doubly, serrate-dentate, teeth usually well spaced. Flowers 25-30 mm diameter, both solitary and in (2-)5-10-flowered cymose clusters on same plant; pedicels 8-10(-12) mm long; calyx campanulate, 5-6 mm long, teeth broadly to narrowly triangular; petals 10-12 mm long, white, obliquely oblong, often notched.; stigmas capitate. Mature carpels 5(-6), compressed. Mericarp winged, main body 4.5-6.5 mm long, brown; wing 3.0-8.5 mm long, slightly curved outwards, orange yellow, finely and sparsely covered with stellate hairs. Description adapted from Allan (1961) and Webb & Simpson (2001).

## SIMILAR TAXA

*Hoheria equitum* is similar but that species is endemic to the Poor Knights and Hen & Chicken Islands. It differs by having distinctly coriaceous, uniformly light green, finely serrated to sub-entire leaves, and smaller flowers which tend to be obscured by the foliage. *Hoheria sexstylosa* is also often confused with *H. populnea*, from which it differs by its distinctive filiramate juvenile growth habit, pendulous branches, and narrower, more finely serrated leaves. The flowers are also somewhat smaller but tend to have 6 rather than 5 carpels.



Planted. Hutt River Trail north of Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 29/02/2016, Licence: CC BY.



Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 21/01/2020, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North Island only from North Cape (Pararaki Stream) south to the northern Waikato and Coromandel. However widely planted and often found naturalising throughout the southern North Island, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands.

## HABITAT

Coastal to montane usually in kauri (*Agathis australis*) forest but also in successional forest associated with kauri. Also common in pōhutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*)-dominated coastal forest.

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## DETAILED TAXONOMY

### GENUS

Hoheria

### FAMILY

Malvaceae

### AUTHORITY

Hoheria populnea A.Cunn.

### SYNONYMS

Hoheria sinclairii Hook.f., H. populnea subsp. vulgaris Kirk var. vulgaris, H. populnea subsp. vulgaris var. sinclairii (Hook.f.) Kirk, H. populnea var. crataegifolia Hook.f. (pro parte)

### TAXONOMIC NOTES

*Hoheria populnea* is a very variable species with well marked, and geographically defined races. This variation needs critical study. Indeed the genus as a whole is in serious need of a modern systematic revision.

### ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

### ENDEMIC GENUS

Yes

### ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

### ECOLOGY

### FLOWERING

January - March

### FRUITING

April - June

### LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Winged mericarps are dispersed by wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

### PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed, and wild seedlings are often found in the vicinity of garden plants. Specimens tend to be short-lived and they often suffer from *Hoheria* dieback - a syndrome which kills portions of the tree and has no cure. An excellent fast-growing tree suitable as a wind break and as temporary shelter (because it is so short-lived). Numerous horticultural selections and cultivars are known.

### OTHER INFORMATION

## CULTIVATION

Commonly sold at most garden centres. A form with purple stamens is known as cv. Osbournei, and comes originally from Great Barrier Island.

## NOTES OF HYBRIDISATION

Hybridises in the northern Waikato and Auckland areas where it naturally meets with *H. sexstylosa*. *Hoheria populnea* is widely planted, often inappropriately as part of restoration plantings, and freely naturalises from these. In cultivation this species hybridises readily with *H. angustifolia*, *H. equitum*, *H. ovata* and *H. sexstylosa*.

## ETYMOLOGY

**hoheria**: Latin version of the Maori name houhere which refers to *H. populnea* and *H. glabrata*.

**populnea**: Poplar-like

## NVS CODE

HOHPOP

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT 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.

## REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

### REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allan, H.H. 1961: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. I, Wellington, Government Printer.

Webb, C.J.; Simpson, M.J.A. 2001: Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons. Christchurch, Manuka Press.

Moorfield, J. C. 2005: Te Aka: Maori-English, English-Maori dictionary and index. Pearson Longman: Auckland, N.Z.

Thorsen, M.J.; Dickinson, K.J.M.; Seddon, P.J. 2009: Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285-309.

## ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet Prepared by P.J. de Lange (9 April 2011). Description adapted from Allan (1961) and Webb & Simpson (2001).

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## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/hoheria-populnea/>

## PDF DATE

25 September 2025