

Beilschmiedia tawa

COMMON NAMES

tawa

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Common canopy tree with a tall dark single trunk. Leaves thin, narrow, gradually tapering to base and the pointed tip, yellowish when young, when mature drooping, glossy, pale underneath. Flowers in yellowish sprays. Fruit very large, dark purple, glossy, containing a large elliptical seed.

FLOWER COLOURS

Green

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Evergreen tree up to 35 m tall. Trunk straight, 1.2-2 m diam., with buttressed base. Bark smooth, dark brown. Branches erect to spreading, slender to moderately robust. Young branchlets, leaves and inflorescences finely pubescent, hairs simple, pale golden. Foliage opposite to sub-opposite, simple, somewhat leathery when mature. Petioles (6-)8(-12) mm. Leaves (30-)40-80(-95) x (8-)11-16(-40) mm, narrowly to broadly lanceolate sometimes elliptic, yellow-green to green, glabrous when mature, undersides glaucous. margins entire, and undulate, apex acute to acuminate. Inflorescences, an erect, axillary panicle up to 100 mm long. Flowers sexually perfect, 2-4 mm diam, pale green, perianth cleft into 6 segments, ovate-oblong, stamens 12. Fruit a pendulous, ellipsoid to ovoid drupe (20-)30(-38) x (9-)12(-18) mm, 1-seeded, pericarp fleshy, dark purple-black when ripe, glaucous or shiny.

SIMILAR TAXA

A very distinct species. The green to greenish-yellow, narrow, entire, willow-like leaves with their glaucous undersides, and large plum-like, dark purple, pendulous drupes serve to immediately distinguish this from all other indigenous trees and shrubs. Some northern and northern offshore island populations differ (in some cases markedly) by their much broader, sometimes slightly bullate dark-green leaves.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Common throughout the North Island. In the South Island common from Cape Farewell east through the Marlborough Sounds. Extending south of there only in the east where it almost reaches Kaikoura (the southern limit is just north of the main town).

HABITAT

Major canopy dominant in the lowland and lower montane forests of the North Island and northern South island. May form pure stands but usually occurs in close association with podocarps such as rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*).



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



Form with broad leaves corresponding to *B. tawaroa* A.E.Wright. In cultivation ex Tiritiri Matangi Island. Aug 2007. Photographer: Peter J. de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

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DETAILED TAXONOMY

FAMILY

Lauraceae

AUTHORITY

Beilschmiedia tawa (A.Cunn.) Benth. et Hook.f. ex Kirk

SYNONYMS

Laurus tawa A.Cunn., Nesodaphne tawa (A.Cunn.) Hook.f., Laurus victoriana Colenso, Beilschmiedia tawaroa A.E.Wright

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Beilschmiedea tawaroa A.E. Wright described by Wright (1984), is not upheld here because it is not ecologically distinct, there is gradation between these large-leaved variants and normal tawa (*B. tawa*), and because aside from leaf width there are no other consistent distinguishing characters (de Lange & Cameron 1999). Plants with *B. tawaroa* characters - as defined by Wright (1984) have now been found as far south as Mt Taranaki and Mahia Peninsula.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING

(October-) January (-May)

FRUITING

(December-) January (-March)

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Fleshy drupes are dispersed by frugivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed. Better germination is achieved if the flesh surrounding the seed is cleaned off.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

UPL: Obligate Upland

Rarely is a hydrophyte, almost always in uplands (non-wetlands).

OTHER INFORMATION

ETYMOLOGY

tawa: Tawa is Te Reo for this tree

NVS CODE

BEITAW

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n=24

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

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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.

de Lange, P.J.; Cameron, E.K. 1999: The vascular flora of Aorangi Island, Poor Knights Islands, northern New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 37: 433-468

Moorfield, J. C. 2005: Te aka : Māori-English, English-Māori dictionary and index. Pearson Longman: Auckland Landcare Research. Ngā Tipu Whakaoranga - Māori Plant Use Database.

<http://maoriplantuse.landcareresearch.co.nz>

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* 2009 Vol. 11 No. 4 pp. 285-309.

Wright, A. E. 1984: *Beilschmiedia* Nees (Lauraceae) in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 22: 109-125.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 12 February 2004. Description adapted from Allan (1961) and Wright (1984).

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/beilschmiedia-tawa/>

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