

Coprosma virescens

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DPT

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Rare orangeish or olive green bushy shrub with tangled wide-angled branches bearing pairs of small pointed oval leaves on flattened leaf stalk. Bark smooth and knobbed, greenish. Leaves 5-9mm long, with a ridge of small hairs on stem between leaf bases. Fruit white with small black dots.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Filiramulate, divaricating greyish or reddish-green shrub or small tree up to 5 m tall with green to greyish bark; branches slender, ascending; branchlets very slender, subtetragonous, flexible, interlacing, glabrous or nearly so. Leaves often fascicled, on slender glabrous petioles 2-6 mm long. Stipules subacute to obtuse, broadly triangular, connate near base, more or less pubescent to glabrous; denticles usually 3. Lamina subcoriaceous, glabrous, pale green, brown-green or reddish, 4-9 × 3-6 mm rhomboid, ovate to ovate-oblong, obtuse, abruptly narrowed to petiole; margins sometimes waved or with a few blunt teeth. Reticulations of veins usually evident on both surfaces, at least when lamina fresh. Male flowers 1-2 on short branchlets; calyx 0; corolla funnelform, lobes ovate, acute, much > tube. Female flowers solitary on short branchlets; calyx-teeth minute, ciliolate; corolla tubular, lobes acute, more or less = tube. Drupe 5-6 mm long, yellowish white, oblong.

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily recognised by the filiramulate, divaricating growth habit, green to greyish bark, and small pale greenish or brown-green rhomboid, ovate to ovate-oblong, obtuse leaves that are abruptly narrowed to the petiole. The drupes are oblong, yellowish-white and up to 6 mm long when fresh. It is perhaps most likely to be confused with *Coprosma tenuicaulis* which is a species of swamps and which differs by having pubescent rather than glabrescent, dark maroon rather than reddish, orange or greenish branchlets, and larger (8-13 × 9-10 mm cf. 5-9 × 3-6 mm in *C. virescens*) orbicular-ovate, spatulate, obtuse leaves which have darker margins and a lighter pigmented central blotch on the upper leaf surface. The drupes of *Coprosma tenuicaulis* are globose, 3-4 mm diameter and dark reddish-black to black

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North and South Islands from the ranges east of Gisborne, and especially around Taihape south. Scarce in Nelson and apparently absent from Marlborough and absent from Westland, common in Canterbury south to Southland. Throughout its range it is mainly eastern and often very uncommon or absent from large parts of its range



Pistillate flowers. Mangatoetoe Stream, Palliser Bay. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 02/10/2010, Licence: CC BY.



Stipule. In cultivation. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 15/04/2007, Licence: CC BY.

HABITAT

Lowland to lower montane. On well drained to poorly draining fertile soils (often overlying calcareous or base-rich igneous rocks). In forest and shrubland.

GENUS

Coprosma

FAMILY

Rubiaceae

AUTHORITY

Coprosma virescens Petrie

SYNONYMS

None (first described in 1879)

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

September - November

FRUITING

May - July

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Very popular in cultivation on account of its unusual growth habit and tolerance of a range of soils and planting situations. Easy from fresh seed and semi-hardwood cuttings. An attractive shrub to small tree that does best in full sun but will tolerate moderate shade. Should be planted in a free draining but moist, fertile soil.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

UPL: Obligate Upland

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

WHERE TO BUY

Commonly sold by most native plant nurseries.

ETYMOLOGY

coprosma: From the Greek kopros 'dung' and osme 'smell', referring to the foul smell of the species, literally 'dung smell'

virescens: Becoming green

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to *Coprosma* species of New Zealand](#)

NVS CODE

COPVIR

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 44

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, RF

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPT, NR, NStr, PF, Sp, TL Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Otago conservation status information is sourced from the "[Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025](#)" Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand, Volume I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsidea, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Allan (1961)

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/coprosma-virescens/>

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