

Adiantum aethiopicum

COMMON NAMES

maidenhair, makaka, true maidenhair

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tufted, stoloniferous fern. **Rhizome** long-creeping (stoloniferous), to 3 mm diameter; wiry, c.1.5 mm diameter; scales chartaceous, yellow, transparent, broadly deltoid, entire, often spirally curled. **Fron**ds yellow-green or bright green, densely tufted, or sometimes scattered along stolons up to 750 mm long. **Stipe** to 400 mm long, glossy, glabrous, red-brown, bearing conspicuous basal scales similar to those of rhizome.

Lamina 120–400 × 50–230 mm, 3-pinnate, ovate to deltoid. pinnae narrowly deltoid. **Pinnules** round to flabellate; distal margin sometimes shallowly lobed; lobe margins entire or obscurely dentate when sterile; stalks not articulate. **Sori** 1–5 along the base of the distal margins, 1–(2) per lobe; soral flaps reniform, lunate to sublunate, usually at the base of a shallow sinus (notch) on the pinnule margin. **Spores** 64 per sporangium, with largest diameter (34.6)–41.1–(53.6) μm.

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinguished from the other New Zealand *Adiantum* by the more or less oblong, generally broader than long, undivided, ultimate segments (pinnules) attached to the stalk at one corner, reflexed reniform indusia set at the base of a small notch in the pinnule margin (this notch set only at the point of attachment of the indusia). Most often confused with *Adiantum raddianum* a naturalised species which differs by the ultimate segments divided into 2 or more distinct lobes, these generally longer than broad.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand. North Island (from Te Pahi south to Waikato and Bay of Plenty, thence rather localised and often absent from large areas until Wairarapa), South Island (recorded once from the Buller River gorge but not seen recently). Also New Caledonia, Australia and South Africa.

HABITAT

Coastal to lowland. Despite its delicate appearance *Adiantum aethiopicum* is often found in very dry, exposed sites in short grassland, on clay pans, stable dunes systems, open scrub and forest. It is also occasionally found in periodically flooded ground in riparian forest and on damp clay banks in shaded gullies.

GENUS

Adiantum

FAMILY

Pteridaceae



Piwhane/Spirits Bay, Te Pahi. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 07/11/2007, Licence: CC BY.



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AUTHORITY

Adiantum aethiopicum L.

SYNONYMS

Adiantum assimile Sw.; *Adiantum trigonum* Labill.

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Minute spores are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown and once established very persistent (to the point of being almost weedy). Despite its range of habitat preferences in the wild this species does best in a rich, well drained but damp soil planted in partial shade.

ETYMOLOGY

adiantum: From the Greek a- 'without, lacking' and diantos 'moistened', the fronds of this fern are supposed to remain dry after submersion in water

aethiopicum: Africa (especially South Africa); name derived from Aethiops, an African and son of Vulcan, the Greek God of metalworking and fire

NVS CODE

ADIAET

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 120

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DP, SO

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.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Bostock, P.D. 1998: Adiantaceae. *Flora of Australia* 48: 248–263.

Bostock PD. 1998. Adiantaceae. *Flora of Australia 48, Ferns Gymnosperms and allied groups*: 248–263. ABRs/CSIRO Victoria, Australia.

Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet Prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (Updated 4 May 2011). Description adapted from Bostock (1998).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/adiantum-aethiopicum/>

