

DUNEDIN BOTANIC GARDEN



Treasured Plants of Southern Māori

Ngāi Tahu

Ngāi Tahu is a South Island tribe (iwi) covering most of the South Island (Te Waipounamu). They have mana whenua, trusteeship of the land.

Taonga Species

Taonga species of plants, birds, marine mammals, fish and shellfish were identified in the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act of 1998 as an acknowledgement of the iwi's rights under the Treaty of Waitangi.

This brochure highlights 21 of the taonga plants. Many were treasured for more than one reason. For more detail and plants see the book "Treasures of Tane" by Rob Tipa.

Education for All

Please leave fruit, flowers and leaves on plants so everyone can see them.

Treasures of Tane

Photos 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21: Rob Tipa

tarata

1

Pittosporum eugenioides | lemonwood

The lemony scent of its leaves has led to its common name of "lemonwood". Flowers, leaves and gum all smell delightful and were used in many perfume recipes. Tarata gum even makes a good glue.



māhoe/hinahina

4

Melicytus ramiflorus | whiteywood

To start fire, early Māori rubbed a hard wood on a slab of softer wood such as māhoe. A groove formed, containing flecks of māhoe which started to smoulder and were then fanned into a flame. People carried fire with them by enclosing a few smouldering, slow-burning sticks of māhoe in a stone container.



karaeopirita kareao/pirita

2

Ripogonum scandens | supplejack

Stiff, springy vines of supplejack were used to make a wide range of fish traps, eel pots and scoop nets. Pākehā and Māori alike used this vine laced between a couple of saplings to make a stretcher to carry injured people out of the bush.



kōtukutuku

3

Fuchsia excorticata | tree fuchsia

Berries are sweet and delicious to eat straight from the tree, easily the best fruit in the New Zealand bush. Before European contact, Māori had few sources of the colour blue so girls coloured their lips with the blue pollen and youth of both sexes used it to decorate their faces.



koromiko

6

Veronica salicifolia | hebe

Various species of hebe, including this one, were famous around the country for being a fast, reliable cure for stomach aches and diarrhoea. During the Second World War dried leaves were sent to New Zealand soldiers overseas as a remedy for dysentery (intestine infection).



rātā

7

Metrosideros umbellata | southern rata

Rātā's hard, dark red timber is good for carving solid pieces that need strength, such as weapons and construction beams. It also works well for refined, intricately carved smaller pieces such as flutes and spinning tops.



harakeke

8

Phormium tenax | flax

When northern chiefs learnt from early Pākehā settlers that this plant didn't grow in England, they were astonished people could live without it. Essentials such as clothes, mats and baskets are woven from this versatile plant. Super-strong rope comes from fibres running the length of its leaves.





horoeaka 9

Pseudopanax crassifolius | lancewood
 In Te Waipounamu (the South Island) Māori made a paintbrush by pounding the tough leaves, extracting the long fibres and tying them together. Such brushes were used in rock painting.



taramea 10

Aciphylla various species | speargrass
 Despite its prickly defence, taramea produces a sticky resin that was mixed with oils to make a lasting scent. It could be hung around the neck, allowing the wearer to enjoy the pleasant perfume wafting up to their nostrils.



tikumū 12

Celmisia spectabilis,
Celmisia semicordata | mountain daisy
 The *Celmisia holosericea* daisy you can see is very closely related to other daisies that were woven into waterproof raincoats, cloaks and hats. The best place to see these plants is in their natural habitat, above the snowline.



kiekie 14

Freycinetia banksii | kiekie
 Kiekie can be used for weaving but not locally as it doesn't grow naturally on the east coast of Te Waipounamu (South Island). In spring and autumn it produces sweet fruit regarded by many as the finest delicacy of the bush. Please leave this though, for others to see.



tutu 16

Coriaria species | tutu
 Despite most parts of this low growing plant being poisonous, early Māori knew how to make a refreshing drink from it, an edible jelly and even a food sweetener. Tutu was also used as indelible ink for tattooing. In the cold months it dies back but you'll see either dead foliage or new shoots.



horopito 19

Pseudowintera axillaris,
Pseudowintera colorata | pepper tree
 Nature's own painkiller, horopito's fresh, peppery leaves were chewed to treat toothache and headaches. Scientists have identified 29 different compounds in horopito, including at least four active antifungals and powerful antioxidants.



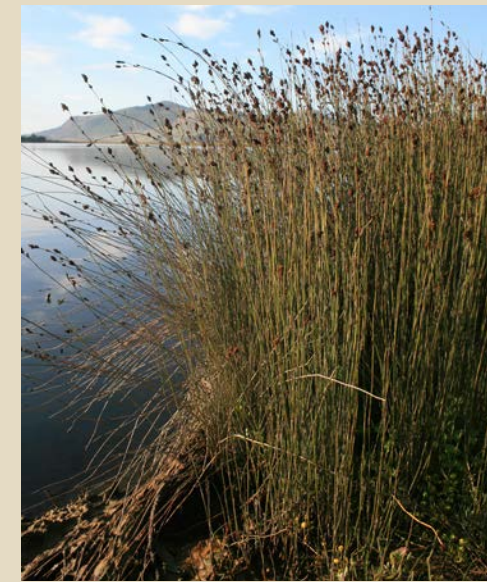
tōtara 11

Podocarpus totara | totara
 This handsome forest giant was the timber of choice for Māori throughout Aotearoa (New Zealand), particularly for building huge canoes, capable of carrying 100 warriors. In the south the outer bark was and still is used as a wrapping to protect poha tīti (kelp bags of preserved mutton birds).



wīwī 15

Juncus species | rushes
 In the days before corrugated iron arrived on our shores, wīwī may have made all the difference between a dry whare (house) and a wet one. Thick layers of wīwī and other grassy plants made roofs and walls waterproof.



ponga 13

Cyathea dealbata | silver fern
 When the fronds were laid silver side up on bush tracks at night, the leaves glowed brightly in the moonlight, lighting the path for walkers. Layers of fronds made good bedding, silver side down so the spores wouldn't blow about when the seed capsules burst.



karaka 17

Corynocarpus laevigatus | karaka
 Ripe fruit contain a lethal poison but this plant was still one of the few cultivated by southern Māori. Nuts inside the orange fruit could be ground up to make bread but only with meticulous preparation to remove the toxin.



hīnau 20

Elaeocarpus dentatus | hīnau
 In autumn and winter the berries can make bread that's so tasty an old Māori proverb says "A hungry man should not be awoken from his rest unless it is to eat hīnau bread." But the flesh is harsh and bitter and was rendered edible only by being soaked in water first, sometimes for months.



ngaio 18

Myoporum laetum | ngaio
 Oil from the sticky black shoots of the leaves, when rubbed onto the skin, is nature's answer to insect repellent. But if you didn't get there in time, you could always rub young shoots on bites to stop them itching.



kōwhai 21

Sophora microphylla,
Sophora prostrata | kowhai
 Traditionally, different parts of the tree were used to produce natural dyes. Dried flowers yielded a clear, yellow dye; seed pods produced a pale yellow colour; and the twigs and bark could be used for duller tans and darker shades.

