

Medicinal Natives

A beginners guide



Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to introduce you to the incredible medicinal uses of our native plants and to serve as a pocket guide for when you enter the ngahere (bush) in search of her medicine.

The two most important things to consider when using native plants medicinally are intention and identification. When you enter the ngahere to harvest, do so with an open heart and take only what you need. When you harvest make sure you are 110% certain that you know what plant you are harvesting. If not, leave it.

Lastly the medicine you are looking for already exists within you. The plants are the keys to unlocking your healing.

Good Luck!



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Horopito

Pseudowintera colorata

Description

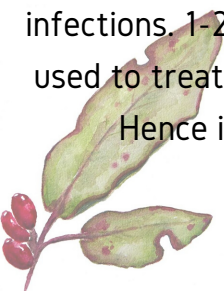
Horopito, or pepper tree grows mostly at higher altitudes and is the first to grow after a land disturbance. The hot peppery taste of its leaves have strong anti-fungal properties and can be used in cooking.

Uses

Used in a range of products to treat Candida fungal infections. 1-2 leaves in a cup of boiling water can be used to treat thrush, tooth-ache and stomach ache. Hence it's other name 'Māori pain killer'.



Tip: The redder the leaf the more active healing component it contains.



Karamū

Coprosma robusta

Description

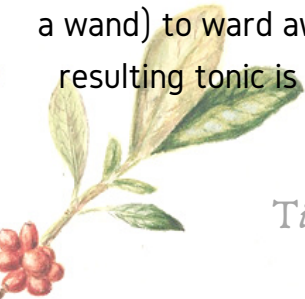
Karamū is a quick growing tree you will find widely distributed across New Zealand. One of the 45 *coprosma* species found in New Zealand this is most recognisable, especially in late-summer with its masses of orange berries that birds love.

Uses

Karamū is used mostly as a spiritual tool (almost like a wand) to ward away bad spirits. Boiled in water the resulting tonic is used to treat urinary and bladder infections.



Tip: The berries are safe to eat. Although not that tasty they are a great food source if you're stuck out in the bush.



Kawakawa

Piper excelsum

Description

One of the most well known plants, Kawakawa is a mostly coastal tree growing up to 5m. It is the closest plant to the supreme being Io, so it carries intense medicinal and spiritual properties.

Uses

The raw leaf can be chewed on to relieve tooth and head ache. The underside of the leaf is used as a poultice over infected wounds. A couple of leaves in a cup of boiled water is a strong blood tonic. Balms made from it are effective on eczema, rashes and stings. Used as an insect repellent when rubbed on skin.



Tip: In spring you can eat the plump orange fruit of the female kawakawa. Some people even make jam!

Koromiko

Hebe stricta

Description

A small shrub, Koromiko is found in many remedial plantings and has beautiful white brush like flowers.

Found usually in coastal bush, it is one of the 80 Hebe's found in New Zealand.

Uses

Koromiko has been widely recognised as a potent remedy for diarrhoea and constipation. The part taken is the closed leaf tips. 5-6 leaf tips ingested will work wonders.

Tip: Drying the leaf tips is a good way to store them for later use. They can be activated by adding them to hot water and drinking the resulting tonic.



Kōwhai

Sophora microphylla

Description

Kōwhai is made up of 8 species of trees all with varying heights and leaf sizes. One of only a few deciduous plants in New Zealand, Tui's love its nectar when in bloom. **Note: Kōwhai is poisonous and should never be ingested internally.**

Uses

The inner bark of Kōwhai is used to treat sprains, bruises, broken bones and aching muscles. Boil the bark in water then apply to affected area.



Tip: Māori used the blooming of the Kōwhai as an indication that it was time to plant kumara.



Photo by Phil Bendle

Kūmarahou

Pomaderris kumeraho

Description

Kūmarahou or gum digger's soap is a 3m shrub found only in the North Island. Inconspicuous for most of the year, it bursts out with bunches of beautiful yellow flowers in spring. Grows in poor quality soils, usually along road sides.

Uses

A magical plant - when boiled down with water the resulting bitter tonic is extremely powerful in treating respiratory problems like asthma, coughs, sore throats and colds.

Tip: Rub the blooming flowers between your hands with water to create an 'in-a-pinch' bush soap.



Mānuka

Leptospermum scoparium

Description

Mānuka or tea tree is one of the most extensively planted trees for restoring land. Due to its tough nature it can grow in wet or dry soils, creating a perfect canopy cover for less sun tolerant species to establish.

Uses

Another plant with many uses. As a tea it treats stomach problems. Boiled in water the vapor is a strong reliever of colds and congestion. As a balm and honey it holds strong anti-fungal properties. The inner bark is drunk as a tea to relieve anxiety.

Tip: To tell the difference from Kānuka, Mānuka leaves are spikey and it holds onto its seed capsules.



Māpou

Myrsine australis

Description

Noticeable from its dark red stems Māpou grows to 6m high on bush fringes. The fruits are relished by birds and chemicals in the leaves provide colour to their feathers.

Uses

The use of Māpou is given away by its dark red stems that look like veins. A boiled down concoction of the leaves and stems is used as a blood thinner to treat high blood-pressure, and other cardiovascular problems.



Tip: It is easy to confuse Māpou with its brother Kohuhu which looks the same, but with brown stems.

Pūriri

Vitex lucens

Description

A big tree growing up to 20m, Pūriri is loved by Kererū, which is the only bird that can swallow and spread the seeds. Only the straightest trees were selected for timber so all that's left are the gnarled knotted ones you see in farm paddocks.

Uses

Pūriri's large thick leaves are boiled down in water and used to treat back-ache and sprains. The leaves have strong anti-septic qualities so can be used on wounds and cuts to halt infection when used as a balm or tonic.

Tip: The holes on Puriri trunks are made by the large grub of the Puriri moth, if you look closely you might spot them in there.



Tūpākīhi

Coriaria arborea

Description

Tūpākīhi, toot or tutu is widely known amongst farmers as toxic. Cattle and pets who eat the berries or leaves succumb to the active ingredient 'Tutin'.

The plant is certainly poisonous when consumed internally but is a powerful Rongoā used externally. It grows along stream and roads.

Uses

Growing in the cracks and the scars of the earth

Tūpākīhi is a deep acting Rongoā used to treat broken bones, aches, muscles strains. Used in a balm or bathing in it is the most effective way to harness its medicinal properties.



Tip: Māori would hollow out larger stems and carve them into flutes.

The Three I's

Intention

Why are you harvesting from this plant? How much do you need?
Always harvest or prepare native plants with a pure intention and only take what you need. Remember to always say thank you to the plant.

Identification

Are you 110% sure that this is the plant you think it is? If there is any doubt, leave it. People have died from consuming mis-identified plants

Intuition

Slow down and take a breath before harvesting native plants, then use your gut or intuition to guide you to make the right choices. Does the plant look healthy? Is it in a healthy environment?

Whakapapa

All of the information found on this page and in the beginners guide was compiled by Dylan Steeples from CVNZ. He has been studying and learning about the medicinal uses of our native plants since 2017. He was taught by a student of Houhepa Delamare, well known for his teaching around this topic, at Te Wananga O Aotearoa. He does not claim to be an expert in this field but with the blessing of his teacher, he is passionate about sharing this knowledge as a vehicle for connecting people with the environment. All other resources that have informed his learning have been listed below. If you want to contact the author about any concerns or questions you have then please email him at dsteeples@cvnz.org.nz



Conservation

Volunteers New Zealand