

# Kawakawa

(*Piper excelsum*)



A member of the pepper family related to the kava plant, well-known big dark green heart shaped leaves usually riddled with holes from the looper caterpillar named for its semi-looping motion ( $\Omega$ ) of getting around. The looper caterpillar feeds at night and poses no threat to the Kawakawa (If you find one inside, the little guy involuntarily hitched a ride on your jersey and would appreciate being returned to his buffet in the bush).

A purplish-black stem with no defined trunk, smooth with many elbow-like joints.

The female plant produce fruit and the fruit size varies but can grow to 8cm, likened to a small corn cob in appearance, ripens predominantly between January and February.

## Size

Up to 6m tall

## Distribution & Habitat

Found in lowland forests throughout New Zealand as far south as Banks Peninsula, prefers coastal environments as a sub canopy species. Prefers a shady environment and will not tolerate full sun well.

## Species it attracts

The fruit is a favourite of the Kererū and Tūi, but will also attract Tauhou (silveryeye) Kākā and Korimako (Bellbird).

## Medicinal Properties

Chewing a leaf can relieve head and tooth aches.

## Where to plant in your garden

Because Kawakawa does not like a lot of sun, it is best to plant under already established trees to present a lush, evergreen background. It prefers free draining soil and is an ideal plant for difficult, shady spots in the garden.



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