

Podocarpus laetus

COMMON NAME

mountain tōtara, Hall's tōtara, thin-barked tōtara, tōtara-kiri-kōtukutuku

SYNONYMS

Podocarpus hallii Kirk; Podocarpus cunninghamii Colenso

FAMILY

Podocarpaceae

AUTHORITY

Podocarpus laetus Hooibr. ex Endl.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Gymnosperms

NVS CODE

PODCUN

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 34

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North Island, South Island and Stewart Island/Rakiura.

HABITAT

Lowland, montane to lower subalpine forest (but notably more common in montane forest). Often found on impoverished soils, immature (skeletal) soils, or sites that are naturally stressed by drought or extreme temperature fluctuations.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).



Photo of Halls totara bark. Photographer: Department of Conservation, Licence: Public domain.



Halls totara, male cones. Photographer: Department of Conservation, Licence: Public domain.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Robust dioecious conifer up to 20 m tall. **Trunk** stout, 1–1.5 m diameter, clad in papery, thin, freely flaking reddish-grey bark, without branches at base. **Branches** slender, erect, spreading or somewhat drooping. **Leaf bud** significantly broader than the diameter, of the branchlet, surrounded by caducous, papery, ovate bracts. **Leaves** yellow-green, green, or brownish-green, erect, leathery; juvenile 25–50 × 4–5 mm, adults 20–30 × 3–4 mm., narrow-linear to linear-lanceolate, acute to acuminate, apex very pungent, mid-vein distinct. **Male cones (strobili)** axillary, 10–25 mm, solitary or up to 5 on a common peduncle. **Female branchlets** axillary. **Ovules** solitary or paired; receptacle of 2–4 scales, irregularly elliptic-oblong to obovate-oblong, maturing as a red, swollen, succulent, sweet tasting “fruit” this surmounted by a 1–(2) elliptic, elliptic-oblong or ovate-oblong, (5)–6.5–8.5 mm long, grey nut brown or dark brown (green when fresh) seed.

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinguished from *Podocarpus totara* var. *totara* by the leaf bud which is wider than the diameter of the branchlet (resembles a meat ball on a stick), and by the broadly ovate bud bracts. The bark is generally papery—hence “thin barked totara”, the leaves (especially juveniles and subadults) are longer and broader with a very sharp, pungent leaf tip. Hybridises with *P. totara* var. *totara* and hybrids can only reliably be distinguished by bud scale and bud diameter characters. See also Gardner (1990) in references below.

FLOWERING

(August)–October–(December)

FLOWER COLOURS

No flowers

FRUITING

Fruits take a year or so to ripen, and may be found throughout the year, usually peaking at about the same time that cones are produced. They are most frequently seen between April and May.

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and hard-wood cuttings.

ETYMOLOGY

podocarpus: Foot or stalk fruit

laetus: From the Latin laetus ‘bright’

WHERE TO BUY

Uncommon in cultivation. Not often seen in gardens though it is commercially available.

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Molloy (2015) has outlined the complex taxonomic history of Hall’s tōtara noting that there are three valid names that could be used for this species, *P. hallii* Kirk, *P. cunninghamii* Colenso and *P. laetus* Hooibr. ex Endl. Molloy (2015) concludes that *Podocarpus laetus* is the earliest legitimate and validly published name, and in the absence of any final ruling on the matter that name is now used here. Previously it had been recommended that *P. cunninghamii* should be used (see Molloy 1985; de Lange & Rolfe 2010).

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (8 January 2005). Description adapted from Kirk 1889 and Allan 1961).

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 p.
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- Gardner R. 1990. Totara and Halls totara. *Auckland Botanical Society Journal* 45: 27–28.
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NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

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