

NZ Myrtaceae Key - Online edition

Leptospermum petersonii F.M.Bailey

Common Names

lemon-scented tea tree

Origin

Australia: coastal eastern Australia from Queensland to Port Macquarie district of New South Wales.

Cultivation

In New Zealand mostly occurs as a cultivated tree; some seedlings are recorded beneath and near parent plants.

Distribution

Scattered records from mainly urban areas in the North Island, particularly Auckland, also from the northern South Island of New Zealand.

Distinguishing Features

- Leaves lemon-scented.
- Leaves with tips blunt and notched.
- Leaves narrowly lanceolate to elliptic.
- Each leaf base with a flange extending down the stem.
- Sepals deciduous.
- Sepal hairy near the tip.
- Stamens in bundles.
- Fruit valves slightly woody.

Habit

Shrub or small tree to about 5 m tall.

Bark and Stem/Trunk

Older stems with persistent fibrous bark. Young branchlets and stems hairy, soon becoming hairless. Each leaf base with a pale, wide flange that extends down the stem.

Leaves

Adult leaves alternate, lemon-scented, narrowly lanceolate to elliptic, usually 20–40 mm long, 2–5 mm wide, same colour on upper and lower surface, leaf blade flat, margins often recurved, leaf surfaces not puckered, hairy at first, but becoming hairless, margins entire, tips blunt, notched, leaf stalks absent.

Flowers

Flowers solitary, axillary, \pm 10–15 mm in diam., stalk \pm 1 mm, petals 5, \pm 5–6 mm long, white; flower base (hypanthium) with obvious oil glands, sepals 5, tips free, hemispherical, margins sometimes hairy, deciduous; stamens 2.5–3.5 mm long, white, in bundles. Main flowering period: summer, but some flowers may be present in autumn.

Fruit

Fruit dry, 5-locular, \pm 6 mm wide, somewhat persistent, surface flaking, becoming woody with age; valves woody, raised, spreading as wide as the rim; lower part of fruit below the rim shallow.

Similar Species

In New Zealand, green-leaved *L. morrisonii* is similar to *L. petersonii*, but the former possesses acute leaf tips and stamens 3.5 mm or longer while the latter possesses notched leaf tips and stamens 3.5 mm or shorter.

Notes

Two subspecies of *L. petersonii* are sometimes referred to. However, according to the Australian Plant Census (APC), *L. petersonii* subsp. *petersonii* (often with lemon-scented leaves) = *L. petersonii*, and *L. petersonii* subsp. *lanceolatum* (without a distinct lemon odour) of Northern Australia and Malesia = *L. amboinense*, as reinstated by Bean (1992). That assessment is followed here.

Leptospermum petersonii subsp. *petersonii* is widely cultivated, and it is unlikely that cultivated specimens display the whole variation found within the subspecies. Collections have been made in New South Wales which lack the distinctive lemon scent and leaf apex which diagnoses *L. petersonii*. Based on the leaf apex, it appears that only the former subspecies, *L. petersonii* subsp. *petersonii*, occurs in New Zealand.

Leptospermum is a genus of about 87 species, mostly Australian, but extending to Malesia and New Zealand.

External Links

- Flora of New Zealand Online
- GBIF
- iNaturalist NZ
- NZPCN
- PlantNET: New South Wales Flora Online
- Plants of South Eastern New South Wales
- VicFlora: Flora of Victoria
- Weeds of Australia: Biosecurity Queensland

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