

NZ Myrtaceae Key - Online edition

Lophomyrtus bullata Burret

Common Names

bubbleleaf, ramarama, New Zealand myrtle

Origin

New Zealand endemic.

Cultivation

Compared to hybrid selections, the species is uncommon in nurseries, or in gardens throughout New Zealand, yet it is an easily propagated, attractive and hardy shrub.

Distribution

Occurs naturally scattered through most of the North Island apart from the Central Plateau, and the upper north-eastern half of the South Island of New Zealand, in coastal and lowland forests. Said to range to North Canterbury and Greymouth, but this is undocumented with collections. Many current observations from the lower South Island in iNaturalist NZ are from cultivated plants, which are most likely to be hybrid cultivars.

Distinguishing Features

- Mature bark fibrous, flaky, grey-brown to reddish.
- Paired leaves with surfaces puckered ('bubbly', bullate) between veins.
- Leaves usually blemished with red, maroon or pink spots or blotches.
- Leaves 15–30 mm long, 10–15 mm wide.
- Leaf tips rounded with short points at the tips.
- Flowers solitary, axillary, petals and stamens white.
- Flowers with 4 petals and sepals.
- Flower and fruit stalks long.
- Fruit a spherical berry, reddish purple to black, ± 6–8 mm wide.

Habit

Branched shrubs or trees to about 12 m tall.

Bark and Stem/Trunk

Mature bark fibrous, flaky, grey-brown to reddish. Young branchlets and stems hairy, becoming hairless with age. Young branchlets 4-angled to begin with, then round with age.

Leaves

Leaves opposite, leathery, gland-dotted, broadly ovate to sub-orbicular, 15–30(–50) mm long, 10–15(–40) mm wide, nearly as wide as long, upper surface dark to yellow green, blemished with irregular or circular pink, red to maroon spots and blotches, lower surface pink or red-streaked, leaf surface wavy, puckered ('bubbly'), finely hairy, becoming hairless with age; margins entire; tips mainly obtuse and often with short points; leaf stalks 2–5(–10) mm long.

Flowers

Flowers solitary, axillary, ± 12–14 mm wide, flower stalks 12–14 mm long, petals 4, white, rounded; sepals 4, persistent, tips free, hairy; stamens numerous, white. Main flowering period: spring to summer.

Fruit

Fruit a dark reddish purple to black spherical berry, 2–3-locular, ± 6–8 mm wide, seeds few to numerous, kidney-shaped.

Similar Species

Most similar to the naturally occurring hybrid *Lophomyrtus ×ralphii* which mostly occurs wherever the range of *L. bullata* and *L. obcordata* overlap. *Lophomyrtus bullata* has little similarity to *L. obcordata*, a species with smaller (5–12 × 5–10 mm) inversely heart-shaped (obcordate) leaves with a smooth rather than 'bubbly' (bullate) surface.

Notes

Lophomyrtus is a genus of two species (*L. bullata* and *L. obcordata*) endemic to New Zealand. *Lophomyrtus ×ralphii*, the naturally occurring hybrid between *L. bullata* and *L. obcordata*, and a suite of hybrid cultivars are more commonly cultivated.

Myrtle rust (caused by *Austropuccinia psidii*) has been recorded in some natural populations of *L. bullata* in New Zealand. It has proven to be highly susceptible to the disease and deaths from myrtle rust are now common. In anticipation of this happening, *L. bullata* was given a conservation status of Threatened – Nationally Critical in 2018.

External Links

- CitSciHub
- Flora of New Zealand Online
- GBIF
- iNaturalist NZ
- NZPCN

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