NZ Myrtaceae Key - Online edition

Melaleuca ericifolia Sm.

Common Names

swamp paperbark

Origin

Australia: New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania, in moist, often seasonally inundated sites such as swamps, riversides and lake margins, also slightly saline sites.

Cultivation

Occasionally cultivated as a windbreak or hedge and ideal for harsh coastal conditions or swamps. Two known cultivation escapes in New Zealand, spreading from established trees that were originally planted.

Distribution

Two sites in New Zealand where it is recorded as naturalised: Lower North Island, Masterton, Lake Henley; South Island, Westport, Waimangaroa.

Distinguishing Features

- Shrub or tree to 8 m tall, bark papery, frequently creating thickets by suckering vigorously.
- Leaves scattered or in whorls of 3, narrow, to 19 mm long, aromatic when rubbed.
- Flowers in a short dense many-flowered spike to 17 mm long; stamens cream to white, 5–7 mm long, fused basal part of stamen bundle to 2 mm long, outer free part of stamens 3–6 mm long.
- Capsules collectively in a dense cylindrical spike, 3–5 mm wide with a wavy rim.
- Flowers spring to summer.

Habit

Shrub or tree to 8 m tall, frequently creating thickets by suckering vigorously. A shorter growth form, to 2–3 m tall has also been available in the New Zealand nursery trade and referred to as "*Melaleuca ericifolia nana*" (dwarf swamp paperbark).

Bark and Stem/Trunk

Bark is papery, flaky, pale brownish or white. Young branchlets slightly hairy.

Leaves

Leaves scattered or in whorls of 3, linear, 7–19 mm long, ± 1 mm wide, tip pointed or blunt, often recurved; slightly hairy to hairless, veins not conspicuous, aromatic, oil glands sometimes visible mostly on lower surface; leaf stalks to 1 mm long.

Flowers

Flowers in a short, dense, many-flowered spike 10–17 mm long, to 20 mm wide, soon growing out to a leafy shoot; shoot axis with short hairs. Petals 5, circular, ± 1 mm long, soon falling. Stamens 5–7 mm long, 7–12 in a bundle, cream to white, filaments in each bundle fused basally for ± 2 mm, free part of filaments 3–6 mm long. Main flowering period: summer.

Fruit

Capsules woody, collectively in a dense spike, individual capsules cylindrical, 3–5 mm wide with a wavy rim produced by persistent remains of sepals.

Similar Species

The suckering habit of *M. ericifolia*, combined with having leaves in whorls of 3 or scattered, and the fused filaments in each stamen bundle of 7–12 stamens help to distinguish it. *M. decora*, *M. incana* and *M. squarrosa*, each planted rarely in parks and gardens in lowland North Island areas, have leaves similar in length to *M. ericifolia*, and short spikes of white flowers with stamens similar in length, approximately 6–8 mm. *Melaleuca decora* has light brown papery bark, leaves alternate, flower spikes to ± 17 mm wide, and stamens in bundles of 20–40. Bark of *M. incana* is fibrous or flaky, leaves in 3s to 4s, flower spikes to ± 15 mm wide, and stamens in bundles of 11–25. *Melaleuca squarrosa* has papery bark and bright green, broad-based leaves with pointed tips that are opposite and arranged in two rows, flower spikes to ± 22 mm wide, and stamens in bundles of 6–12. *Melaleuca lanceolata*, identified once from a northern North Island site, has similar length leaves (to ± 15 mm long) with a pointed tip, alternate on the branch, spikes of white flowers 20–50 mm long and to 23 mm wide, bark that is dark grey, rough, firm and fibrous, and stamens ± 4–7 mm long in bundles of 7–15.

Notes

Melaleuca is a genus of about 230 species, centred in Australia but extending to Asia, Malesia, and New Caledonia. We follow the Australian Plant Census (APC) by recognising *Melaleuca* and *Callistemon* as separate genera.

External Links

- Flora of New Zealand Online
- GBIF

- iNaturalist NZ
- PlantNET: New South Wales Flora Online
- Plants of South Eastern New South Wales
- VicFlora: Flora of Victoria