

NZ Myrtaceae Key - Online edition

Melaleuca linariifolia Sm.

Common Names

flax-leaved paperbark, narrow-leaved paperbark, snow-in-summer

Origin

Australia: indigenous to coastal areas of Queensland and New South Wales, also one site in Victoria; naturalised in Western Australia.

Cultivation

In New Zealand occasionally planted in parks and gardens as an ornamental tree; no records of naturalisation.

Distribution

Lowland North Island and northern South Island areas of New Zealand.

Distinguishing Features

- Shrub or tree to 10 m tall, bark papery, often profusely flowering in early summer.
- Leaves in opposite to more-or-less opposite pairs, each pair being at right angles to the pair below, linear or slightly wider in the middle, to 45 mm long and 3.5 mm wide, aromatic when rubbed.
- Many-flowered spikes up to 40 mm long, flowers faintly scented, stamens white to cream, 30–70 per bundle, to 20 mm long, filaments of each bundle fused basally for 8–15 mm, the free end of the filaments occurring along the margin and at apex of the long, fused filament bundle.
- Capsules collectively in a dense cylindrical spike, capsules small, cylindrical to almost globose, 3–4 mm wide, sepals somewhat persistent.
- Flowers late spring to summer.

Habit

Shrub or tree to 10 m tall.

Bark and Stem/Trunk

Bark papery. Branchlets initially hairy, soon becoming hairless.

Leaves

Leaves arranged in opposite to more-or-less opposite pairs, each pair being at right angles to the pair below, linear or slightly wider in the middle, 10–45 mm long, 1–3.5 mm wide, flat or concave above, pointed, soon almost hairless, 1- or faintly 3-veined; leaves aromatic when rubbed, oil glands sometimes distinct; leaf stalks \pm 1 mm long.

Flowers

Flowers in many-flowered spikes up to 40 mm long, mostly 20–30 mm wide; axis hairy or hairless, usually growing on into a leafy shoot, faintly scented. Petals 5, \pm 3 mm long. Stamens white to cream, \pm 30–70 per bundle, about 8–20 mm long, filaments of each bundle fused basally for 8–15 mm, with the free end of the filaments (to \pm 3 mm long) occurring along the margin and at the apex of the fused filament bundle. Main flowering period: late spring to summer.

Fruit

Capsules collectively in a dense cylindrical spike, each capsule cylindrical to almost globose, 3–4 mm wide, sepals somewhat persistent.

Similar Species

Melaleuca linariifolia is described in Australian literature as often confused with two other similar white-flowered species: *M. alternifolia* and *M. trichostachya*. These species all have stamen filaments fused for 10 mm or more, and with the free end of the filaments occurring along the margin and at the apex of the fused basal part of bundle. *M. trichostachya* is not reported from New Zealand but has shorter stamens 7–12 mm long, in bundles of 34–66 or more, and top-shaped fruit 3–4 mm high, to 3.5 mm wide, with raised valves. *M. alternifolia*, planted rarely in parks and gardens as an ornamental tree in lowland areas of the North Island, also has papery bark and narrow leaves to \pm 30 mm long, but they are arranged in 3s or spirally along the stem and usually less than 1 mm wide, whereas *M. linariifolia* has opposite leaves that may be 1–3 mm wide; *M. alternifolia* stamens are 9–13 mm long with the filaments fused up to 10.5 mm, in bundles of 24–50, whereas stamens of *M. linariifolia* are 8–20 mm long, the filaments fused for 8–15 mm and in bundles of \pm 30–70.

Melaleuca bracteata is also planted rarely in parks and gardens in lowland areas of the North Island, is white-flowered and has leaves to 28 mm long, often twisted, but has hard, dark, sometimes fissured bark. It flowers in spring, has stamens \pm 8 mm long in bundles of 16–25 and cup-shaped fruit \pm 3 mm wide. *M. decora* and *M. incana*, white-flowered trees also planted rarely in parks and gardens in lowland areas of the North Island, both have leaves to \pm 15 mm long, and stamens 7–8 mm long (shorter than *M. linariifolia*) but neither has such a long united section of the stamen bundle as *M. linariifolia*. Leaves of *M. incana* are in 3s to 4s, and stamens are in bundles of 3–11; leaves of *M. decora* are alternate and stamens in bundles of 20–40; bark of *M. incana* is fibrous or flaky, and *M. decora* has light brown papery bark.

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

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

Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence (CC BY 4.0).

