

NZ Myrtaceae Key - Online edition

Myrtus communis L.

Common Names

common myrtle, Greek myrtle

Origin

Southern Europe, north Africa, western Asia, Macaronesia and the Indian Subcontinent.

Cultivation

Propagated by seed or semi-hardwood cuttings. Numerous cultivars in Europe. Cultivated occasionally in gardens, sometimes as hedges.

Distribution

Few collections or observations, mainly from gardens, across New Zealand. *Myrtus communis* 'Variegata', a selection with variegated foliage, is also grown in New Zealand.

Distinguishing Features

- Flowers with 5 sepals and petals.
- Leaves pointed, often with a spike at the tip.
- Leaves aromatic if crushed.
- Fruit ellipsoidal to sub-globose.
- Fruit a fleshy, blue-black berry.
- Fruit 3-locular.

Habit

Shrub or trees up to 5 m tall.

Bark and Stem/Trunk

Bark thin, pale-grey to light brown, developing brown to tan peeling segments showing paler layers beneath.

Leaves

Leaves opposite, elliptic, leathery, both surfaces the same shade of green, 20–50 mm long, \pm 15 mm wide, dotted with oil glands, aromatic if crushed; leaf surface flat, not puckered, upper surface hairless, lower surface, midvein and margins with scattered hairs when young, becoming hairless with age; margins entire, slightly rolled under (revolute); tips pointed, some ending in a short spine; leaf stalks 1 mm long.

Flowers

Flowers mostly solitary, axillary, to 3 cm diam., fragrant, flower stalks \pm 10–15 mm long, petals 5, white, rounded, spreading; sepals 5, tips free, persistent, hairless; stamens numerous, white, protruding from flower, longer than petals. Main flowering period: spring to summer.

Fruit

Fruit a fleshy berry, blue-black, ellipsoid to sub-globose, 3-locular, \pm 9 mm long, 7 mm wide.

Similar Species

Luma apiculata is similar to *M. communis*, but the former has flowers with four sepals and petals and 2-locular round, purple-black fruit, and the latter possesses flowers with 5 sepals and petals and 3-locular, ellipsoid to sub-globose, blue-black fruit.

Notes

Myrtus communis is susceptible to myrtle rust (caused by *Austropuccinia psidii*).

Essential oil from leaves, flowers and fruits of *M. communis* is widely used in food, liqueur and cosmetic industries.

Myrtus contains three species, as currently recognised. Numerous names were proposed in the genus, but almost all have been transferred to other genera or regarded as synonyms. Only *M. communis* is widely cultivated.

External Links

- GBIF
- [iNaturalist NZ](#)

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