

## NZ Myrtaceae Key - Online edition

# *Ugni molinae* Turcz.

### Synonyms

*Myrtus ugni* Molina

### Common Names

Chilean guava, strawberry myrtle

### Origin

South America: Chile and adjacent regions of southern Argentina.

### Cultivation

The fruit is cultivated in New Zealand gardens to a small extent, where the Chilean native is often marketed as 'NZ cranberry'. Some variegated-leaved cultivars are available, including *U. molinae* 'Sungold'. Cultivated plants reseed easily, sometimes naturalising into indigenous vegetation.

### Distribution

In New Zealand cultivated mainly in home gardens in the North Island and South Island; naturalised extensively on the Chatham Islands; naturalised records also from Egmont National Park in Taranaki and from Kaipara in Northland.

### Distinguishing Features

- Aromatic, bushy shrub.
- Suckering and forming dense thickets.
- Flowers singly or in pairs in the leaf axils.
- Flowers pendulous.
- Flowers fragrant.
- Petals pale pink.
- Fruit fleshy, rounded, and dark purplish-red when ripe.

### Habit

Bushy shrub up to 2 m tall.

### Bark and Stem/Trunk

Bark pale brown, smooth. Young branchlets and stems red, hairy, becoming hairless with age.

### Leaves

Leaves opposite, ovate, 7–34 mm long, 6–28 mm wide, longer and narrower on juvenile shoots, upper surface dark, glossy green and paler below, leaf surface flat, not puckered, upper surface hairless, lower surface sparsely hairy, becoming hairless with age, midrib raised, hairy at first, becoming hairless with age; margins entire, slightly recurved; tips pointed; leaf stalks hairy, red when young,  $\pm$  2 mm long.

### Flowers

Flowers singly or in pairs in the leaf axils,  $\pm$  10 mm in diam., pendulous, flower stalks  $\pm$  10 mm long, petals mostly 5, 5–7 mm long, white to pink, petals overlapping to form a lampshade-like structure; sepals mostly 5, tips free, persistent, light brown for the most part, but red where they form a calyx tube, rim of tube or entire calyx tube also red; stamens white, shorter than petals. Main flowering period: late spring to mid-autumn.

### Fruit

Fruit a fleshy, rose or dark purplish-red, globular berry, gland-dotted, two recurved and highly reduced leaves below the fruit, persistent recurved sepals on top of the fruit, 3-locular, 10–15 mm wide. The flesh is white and sweet.

### Similar Species

Could be confused with indigenous shrubs, especially *Neomyrtus* and *Lophomyrtus*, and also has some leaf similarities with *Myrtus communis* and *Luma apiculata*. Pendulous, pale pink flowers and dark red fruit are distinctive.

*Neomyrtus* has oval, silvery leaves, small pendulous, white flowers to 7 mm diam. with 5 petals and sepals, and orange or yellow fruit. *Lophomyrtus* species have either small heart-shaped or larger 'bubbly' leaves, white flowers with 4 petals and sepals, and bright to dark red or black fruit.

*Myrtus communis* has leaves with a spike at the tip, white flowers with 5 petals and sepals, and blue-black, ellipsoid to sub-globose fruit to 9 mm long. *Luma apiculata* is a tree with orange-brown and cream bark, leaf tips abruptly pointed, the main vein extended to a tip  $\pm$  1 mm long, flowers with 4 petals and sepals, and fruit a purple-black, round berry.

### Notes

*Ugni molinae* is susceptible to myrtle rust (caused by *Austropuccinia psidii*).

*Ugni molinae* is listed as a DOC Environmental Weed and a Regional Pest Management Strategy species in New Zealand.

*Ugni* is a genus of four species indigenous to southern Mexico and South America. Only *U. molinae* is widely cultivated.

### External Links

- Flora of New Zealand Online (species profile)
- Flora of New Zealand Online (weed profile)
- GBIF
- iNaturalist NZ
- NZPCN

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