

# Biodiversity



## Akeake (*Dodonaea viscosa*)

Number 26

### DESCRIPTION

Akeake is easily recognised by its distinctive bright green long thin wavy leaves, flaking bark and its papery winged seed capsules. It is a hardy, coastal shrub or small tree. In the right conditions, it will grow to about 10m high with a spreading crown and a trunk of around 30cm in diameter. The leaves are alternate, thin, light green with smooth margins and raised veins. The bark is reddish brown and peels off in long, thin strips. Akeake flowers are non-descript. They form in panicles at the end of branches from spring through to mid-summer. The fruit, however, are very visible as a capsule with two to four pale yellow wings which turn brown when dry and ripe. There are usually one or two seeds per capsule.

### DISTRIBUTION

Akeake is native to New Zealand and grows throughout the North Island and northern parts of the South Island. It has also been found on the Chatham Islands, where it may have been introduced. It is also widely distributed through the Southern Hemisphere, with different subspecies and varieties in Australia, Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America.



Akeake naturally occurs in coastal and lowland zones, favouring areas of open forest or scrub. It prefers drier sites such as coastal river valleys, steep hillsides and cliffs and stabilised dunes. It is drought-tolerant and will handle light frosts. However, it does not like shade.

### AKEAKE IN TARANAKI

The natural range for akeake extends around the coastline from Tongaporutu in the north to Waitotara at the southern end of the region. Its range also extends inland to the back of Inglewood and Eltham.

The New Plymouth District Council planting opposite Airport Drive, Bell Block, provides some good examples of akeake that were planted about 25 years ago. The Taranaki Regional Council recommends planting akeake in sheltered, drier sites within the coastal and lowland zones throughout the Taranaki Region.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Fence off areas of scrub and forest to prevent browsing by sheep, cattle and wild animals.
- When planting akeake ensure it is eco-sourced to preserve our local form.
- Avoid planting the purple akeake in restoration plantings. Purple akeake is a cultivar – it is a plant that does not occur naturally in the wild.



### CONSERVATION

Akeake is not a nationally threatened or endangered plant. It is recognised as being regionally distinctive, as it is generally uncommon in the Taranaki region.

### THREATS

- Trampling and browsing by domestic and feral cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and possums.
- Weed competition.

### QUICK FACTS

- The Maori name akeake means 'forever and ever'.
- Akeake wood is the heaviest of New Zealand woods; it is also extremely tough and durable. Maori used akeake for carved walking staves, clubs and other weapons.
- Akeake belongs to the Sapindaceae family, members of this family are commonly known as 'soapberries' or 'soapnuts' as the fruit pulp is used to make soap.