



Puarangi *Hibiscus trionum*

Puarangi is the native Hibiscus; it belongs to the Mallow or Malvaceae family. Though this herb is often found in our



gardens, particularly in the North Island, there is very little known about it, from a medicinal and historical context. There are two other *Hibiscus* species included here – all three are considered to be interchangeable in use.

Hibiscus trionum-<https://www.naturallynative.co.nz/industrialgarden.php>

Identification & Cultivation: *H. trionum* is the more commonly known of the three; It was originally considered to be a native plant, though more recently it is considered to be a ‘coloniser’, as it is considered to be a native of Africa, having been here a long time. It is considered to be a short-lived perennial, though, in cooler climates, it is grown as an annual. Sow seeds in early spring. Take cuttings of half-ripe wood, in summer. If in a cooler climate, the overwinter the young plants in a greenhouse and plant out in the spring. It grows to about 50-80cms high, has deeply serrated and slightly bristly bright green leaves. It prefers full sun and is tolerant of a variety of soil types. The flowers can vary, from cream to soft yellow, with a deep maroon-purple centre, with typical Hibiscus-type floral parts. As with a number of Malvaceae, each bloom lasts just a day. If pollinated, after flowering, a ‘bubble-like’ seed pod is produced – this is the reason for some of the common names, which include the word ‘bladder’. To encourage it to survive for more, prune if heavily in late autumn and mulch well. It has spread freely around the world, as a garden plant and in some places; it has become to be considered a bit of a weed.



Hibiscus richardsonii-<http://www.terrain.net.nz/friends-of-te-henui-group/plants-native-botanical-names-g-to-l/hibiscus-richardsonii-puarangi.html>

It is closely related, though genetically different to the much rarer *Hibiscus richardsonii*, also called Puarangi, which it is often confused with. This rarer species lacks the maroon centre to its flowers and has smaller, more finely serrated leaves and the pods contain smaller seeds. It is considered to be critically endangered in the wild; stock love to eat this herb. This short-lived perennial generally grows to about 1 metre high, and is indigenous to coastal areas of the North Island, particularly the East Coast and some off-shore islands. It is also indigenous to some areas of Eastern Australia.

Another close relative is *Hibiscus diversifolius*, more commonly known as the native hibiscus or swamp hibiscus or prickly hibiscus. It also is critically endangered in the wild. Its flowers (spring-summer) are more like *H. trionum*, with a maroon throat, it grows between 1-2 metres tall, though it has prickly stems and grows best in damp or swampy ground. It is also native to part of Africa, Australia, Asia and Pacific Islands. It is thought that the seeds are dispersed in the sea.

Part/s Used: Aerial parts.

Harvesting: Collect the seeds as the seedpods mature and dry. Harvest the foliage during the growing season.

Energetic Character: Cool, moist, sweet.

Constituents: Mucilage from mucilaginous polysaccharides, the seeds contain 22–24% of oil and a small quantity of gossypol, a phenol, a constituent also found in cotton seeds, which is suggested to have anti-malarial properties.

Therapeutic Actions: Mucilaginous, demulcent, emollient and nutritive.

Medicinal Uses: The plant has mucilaginous and emollient properties, sadly, there is very little known about this herb. It is related to other indigenous Malvaceae species (Lacebark or Houhere – *Hoheria populnea* and Cork tree or Whau - *Entelea arborescens*) and it is considered that it is similar in its therapeutic constituents and actions; emollients and demulcent. All these plants are used in similar ways medicinally; *Hibiscus tillaceus* is used in the Pacific Islands externally for treating broken bones and as a steam bath. These herbs can be used internally and topically.

Dosages: There do not appear to be suggested therapeutic dosages for these species.

Culinary Uses: the leaves of this plant are mucilaginous, which can be beneficial for those with digestive dysfunction, they don't have much flavour, though they can be used as a vehicle for other flavours and ingredients. The seeds have high oil content and should be eaten in moderation, particularly by men!

Other Uses: The seeds potentially could be used as a dye plant, as one of its constituents, gossypol, is used for its yellow pigment; though, if mordants are used, it is not apparently recorded.

History & Mystery: Other common names for Puarangi include bladder hibiscus, Venice mallow, starry hibiscus, flower-of-an hour and bladder ketmia.

It appears to have been in Aotearoa for a long time, and also, its seeds must have had long viability, as it has been known to germinate in profusion, in sites which previously used Maori garden sites, when the ground is disturbed – perhaps the Polynesian canoes brought it here?

As this herb has so little recorded use and research, I think it would be a good idea to grow it and use it and for you to record your results and recipes?

Let's get growing these beautiful plants.

Hibiscus trionum Peter McIntosh <https://www.odt.co.nz/lifestyle/home-garden/native-hibiscus-enigma>



Prepared by Karina Hilterman for the Herb Federation of New Zealand's Herb Awareness Week 2018
Inquiries to HFNZ, PO Box 546, Fielding 4740 - www.herbs.org.nz

***Advisory Note:** This text is given a general guidance. If any adverse reactions occur or symptoms persist, please contact a qualified Medical Herbalist or Doctor immediately