



TANEKAHA

Phyllocladus trichomanoides



Family Podocarpaceae

Common name Celery Pine

Description Tanekaha is a New Zealand native with species found growing in the North Island from Northland to Taranaki, and in the Marlborough, Nelson areas of the South Island. This attractive native with a conical shape typical of the conifer family is often found growing naturally with Kauris which also favour the same infertile, lowland soils. The upright, tall, pyramid habit of Tanekaha makes it an excellent specimen tree or for planting in groups.

The tree can grow up to a height of 20 metres, spreading to 3 metres in width, with the smooth barked trunk often measuring one metre in diameter at maturity.

The common name 'celery pine' refers to the fernlike, leathery branchlets which resemble celery leaves. Technically these flattened stems are called cladodes.

Both male and female flowers and cones occur on the same tree, the female cones being small and purple. While the male cones, in clusters of 5 – 10 are deep purple they change to a crimson colour.

Historical uses Early Maori pounded the bark and soaked flax garments and mats with this pulp in cold water before bringing the whole mixture to the boil. This produced a red-brown dye. In the late 19th century tanekaha bark was exported in large quantities to Germany as a source of red and pink dyes and to London for use as an organic mordant in the manufacture of kid gloves.

The dye was used in World War One to make the soldiers khaki coloured uniforms.

Uses Tanekaha produces a quality timber which is strong yet pliable. The wood has a range of uses from mine props, fish hooks and in threshing machines. It is a good stable wood for carving, even when freshly cut. Its flexibility makes it suitable for fishing rods. Young saplings are sometimes knotted and shaped to form walking sticks with handle and left to grow till they are of the right thickness and maturity before being harvested and dried.

Medicinal “Look after the liver and you look after your health”.
Tanekaha is a native New Zealand plant that has the constituents to help in liver problems and is often included in herbal formulas. Suzanne Aubert (a Catholic sister, actively involved with the Maori, in the late 19th century) singled it out to use in her ‘Natanata’ medicine which she found was unrivalled in the treatment of chronic illness of the stomach. It can help to fortify the immune system, revitalise the constitution and balance the hormonal system.
Prescribed by a naturopath in a tincture form Tanekaha can be used internally for dysentery and diarrhoea, internal haemorrhage, menstruation problems and liver disorders. Externally Tanekaha can be applied to boils, abscesses, septic infections as well as to burns.
The bark is commonly the part used, by boiling a few broken sticks or bark in a pot of water. Also used are the ‘leaves’ or cladodes in the same way for glandular swellings. The longer the bark dries before boiling the more potent the brew. This should be applied sparingly.

Constituents The tannin in Tanekaha gives the bark its anti-microbial action, and bitter astringent taste, which may play a role in protection from predators, though Tanekaha can be attacked by scale. Inositol, a carbohydrate, though not a classical sugar, is the constituent that is beneficial when Tanekaha is used medicinally for cirrhosis, hepatitis, fatty liver and high cholesterol.

Caution Tanakaha should not be used if pregnant as it can bring away the placenta.

References Angela Chadwick – Self Heal www.wikipedia.org;
www.taranakiplants.net.nz; Which Native Tree –
1992 author Andrew Crowe,
Chapter – “using the tree pages”, page 30.

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