

# Tail of the fish

Starting at the top – this first installment in a series looking at regional variations in native flora focuses on Northland.

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**A**s a launching point for a series on the regional floras of New Zealand, Northland is not just geographically convenient. It is one of the most floristically distinctive parts of the country, with a high number of plants confined to this relatively young peninsula at the top of the country.

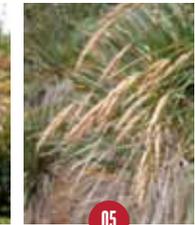
As with future instalments in this series, this article is not just concerned with plants that are regionally endemic, but also plants that are characteristic of the region, or those that achieve greatest abundance in this area. It is by no means a comprehensive list (for example, kauri is not included), as part of its focus is to put forward species that are little-known or undervalued.

One plant that very firmly fits within this category is *Pseudopanax gilliesii*, an elegant and compact species that has scarcely registered on the radar of the landscape industry, yet has enormous potential. It is most similar to *P. lessonii*, but achieves smaller dimensions and bears finer leaves than its near relative.

*P. gilliesii* occurs in the area that surrounds Whangaroa harbour, where another Northland endemic perches atop the rocky cliffs that contribute so much to Whangaroa's spectacular scenery. *Coprosma aff. neglecta* is one of a number of closely related forms that grow in far-flung parts of Northland's coastline. In recent years, this low shrub has gained some degree of popularity among landscapers, for its role in establishing low structure within plantings (particularly the Maunganui Bluff form of the species complex, which is grown by Oratia Native Plant Nursery).

Many of Northland's endemic species are associated with cliff vegetation. This makes sense, as cliffs act like 'islands' within the wider landscape – and this isolation can lead to speciation, especially where unique and demanding conditions are thrown in to the mix.

The most extreme case study of this is evident at the Surville Cliffs, where a number of species have evolved despite toxic soils and an unforgiving maritime environment. Several of these are horticulturally significant, including *Pomaderris paniculosa ssp. novae-zelandiae* (a rusty brown-coloured shrub with an expressive, weeping form), a creeping form of *Corokia cotoneaster*, the diminutive *Coprosma distantia*, and *Coprosma neglecta*.



01: *Leionema nudum*. 02: *Hebe speciosa*. 03: *Pseudowintera insperata*. 04: *Ackama rosaefolia*. 05: *Chionochloa bromoides*. 06: *Coprosma neglecta* Maunganui.

At the opposite end of the altitudinal range, unique plant species endure in the cloud forest of the Waima Range, the system of peaks that hovers to the south of the Hokianga. Of these, the medium-sized tree, *Ackama nubicola*, caused the most excitement upon its discovery in 2000, although it has not made its way into cultivation. However, its near relative, makamaka (*A. rosifolia*), which grows in many parts of Northland (including in association with *A. nubicola*), has been available for many years. Makamaka's burgundy-tinted foliage and frothy, cream-coloured flowers stake a strong claim for its inclusion in gardens, although one needs to bear in mind that makamaka requires sufficient moisture to succeed.

An attractive groundcover that would be a good shout for the longest name in the New Zealand flora, *Mazus novaezeelandiae ssp. impolitum f. hirtum*, is now critically endangered, having previously occurred at a number of sites in the Far North. Another critically endangered groundcover, *Leptinella rotundata*, endures in cliff seepages at a few points along the western coast of Northland. This is a fine groundcover that I have found benefits from growing interlaced with other groundcovers of equal vigour.

Two notable species from forest habitats are the small-leaved *Coprosma parviflora* and the recently-described and critically endangered Northland horopito, *Pseudowintera insperata*. The former has been propagated by nurseries for some time, and is an excellent plant for structure, whilst the latter is just coming into cultivation, but demonstrates tremendous potential for a similar purpose. Both of these species deserve the attentions of horticulturists, as does so much of Northland's distinctive and varied flora. 📌

## NORTHLAND'S FLORA: THE RARE, ENDANGERED & UNDERUSED

NAME	Height (m)	WIDTH (m)	GROWTH FORM	NOTES
<i>Ackama nubicola</i>	4	4	Small tree	Recently-described; not in cultivation, but interesting regional endemic
<i>Ackama rosaefolia</i>	4	4	Small tree	Very attractive, frothy cream flowers; requires moisture and open aspect
<i>Alseuosmia banksii</i>	1.2	0.8	Shrub	Exquisitely scented flowers; for shade; easier than other toropapa
<i>Arthropodium bifurcatum</i>	0.8	0.8	Clumping herb	Recently-described species of rengarenga from Far North; in cultivation
<i>Machaerina complanata</i>	1	0.8	Upright sedge	Formerly <i>Baumea complanata</i> ; vibrant green leaves; brown flowers
<i>Chionochloa bromoides</i>	0.6	0.7	Tussock	Small species of tussock that is endemic to Northland; attractive flowers
<i>Christella dentata</i>	0.9	0.7	Ground fern	Very rare fern; known from just 2 sites in the wild; upright leaves
<i>Clematis cunninghamii</i>	3	1	Climber	Commonly found in forests north of Auckland; frothy, cream flowers
<i>Clianthus puniceus</i>	2	3	Shrub	The well-known kakabeak; the sole remaining wild plant is in the Kaipara
<i>Colensoa physaloides</i>	1.2	1.2	Subshrub	Remarkable blue flowers; leaves and form similar to a hydrangea
<i>Coprosma distantia</i>	0.2	1	Creeping shrub	Small-leaved creeping shrub from Surville Cliffs; good for low contrast
<i>Coprosma aff. neglecta</i>	0.7	1.2	Dwarf shrub	Gently mounding shrub; a range of related forms occur in Northland
<i>Coprosma parviflora</i>	2.5	1.6	Shrub	Wonderful tiered growth form; small-leaved shrub with silver-grey leaves
<i>Coprosma spathulata</i> ssp. <i>hikuruana</i>	0.3	1.5	Creeping shrub	Dark purple spoon-shaped foliage; from understorey at Surville Cliffs
<i>Corokia cotoneaster</i> - North Cape	0.7	1	Low shrub	Useful, creeping form is due to toxic, ultramafic geology at Surville Cliffs
<i>Dianella latissima</i>	1	1.1	Flax-like	Large species of turutu with wide leaves; coastal and inland habitats
<i>Fuchsia procumbens</i>	0.3	2	Spreading shrub	Small, psychedelic flowers and bright, light green foliage; coastal
<i>Hebe diosmifolia</i>	2	1.2	Shrub	Particularly good species of Hebe, which holds its form well; narrow leaves
<i>Hebe flavida</i>	3.5	1.6	Shrub / tree	Large species of Hebe with upright growth form and bright green leaves
<i>Hebe perbella</i>	1.5	1.2	Shrub	Endangered shrub of high points on Northland's West Coast; lovely flowers
<i>Hebe speciosa</i>	0.8	1.5	Low shrub	Well-known but endangered species; Northland is its stronghold
<i>Kunzea ericoides</i> var. <i>linearis</i>	6	2.5	Tree	Very fine form of kanuka, mostly from coastal areas; upright and compact
<i>Leionema nudum</i>	3	1.8	Large shrub	One of our most beautiful native flowers; white flowers on delicate shrub
<i>Leptinella rotundata</i>	0.02	0.6	Groundcover	Critically endangered in the wild; seems to grow best in light shade
<i>Mazus novaezelandiae</i> ssp. <i>impolitus</i>	0.02	0.8	Groundcover	Two forms exist of this groundcover of damp habitats; attractive flowers
<i>Metrosideros bartlettii</i>	10	6	Tree	Critically endangered white-flowered tree rata; grows in swampy forest
<i>Microlaena carsei</i>	0.3	0.3	Grass	Like a small form of bush rice grass ( <i>Microlaena avenacea</i> ); damp shade
<i>Myrsine aquilonia</i>	2.5	1.6	Shrub	From Poor Knights Islands and a couple of mainland sites; tidy form
<i>Nestegis apetala</i>	6	5	Tree	Fantastic coastal tree; deserves to be used much more by landscapers
<i>Pimelea orthia</i>	0.3	1	Creeping shrub	Similar to <i>P. prostrata</i> , except with upright tips; new to cultivation
<i>Pittosporum pimeleoides</i>	1.4	1	Shrub	Very refined look; a dwarf shrub with fluffy foliage and a compact habit
<i>Pittosporum umbellatum</i>	5	2	Tree	Vibrant, light green foliage on an upright small tree; huge potential
<i>Pomaderris paniculosa</i> ssp. <i>novaezelandiae</i>	0.9	2	Low shrub	Mounding stems of russet-tinged leaves; very fine garden plant
<i>Pomaderris phyllicifolia</i>	1.4	1.8	Shrub	Endangered in NZ; frothy cream flowers are produced over dense bush
<i>Pseudopanax gilliesii</i>	2.5	2.5	Small tree	Excellent, compact species of <i>Pseudopanax</i> from eastern Northland
<i>Pseudowintera insperata</i>	2	1.5	Shrub / tree	Critically endangered horopito; considerable potential; new to cultivation
<i>Todea barbara</i>	1	1.4	Ground fern	Impressive fern, whose growth form is reminiscent of a cycad