



## *Piper excelsum* subsp. *psittacorum*

### Common Name(s):

kawakawa, pepper tree

### Current Threat Status (2012):

Naturally Uncommon

### Distribution:

Indigenous. Kermadec Islands (Raoul Island). Also Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands.

### Habitat:

Coastal forest where it is often an important component of the shrub layer.

### Features\*:

Dioecious shrub to small suckering tree up to 3 m tall, branching from base. Branches terete up to 40 mm diameter, initially bright green, maturing dull greenish-brown. Leaves mildly aromatic with a slight peppery taste when chewed; petioles u-shaped in cross-section, upper surface grooved, 20-80 mm long, green to yellow-green; lamina slightly bullate, 50-180 × 60-200 mm, pale green to dark green, rarely yellow-green, broadly ovate to suborbicular, base cordate, rounded or rarely with ends overlapping, apex distinctly acuminate, margins entire; main nerves 5-9, raised slightly above lamina surface. Inflorescence a solitary or paired spike bearing numerous, crowded flowers on a slender rachis, each flower subtended by a peltate scale 1.5-2.0 mm diameter; male spikes to 200 mm long, often faintly tapered, stamens 2-3; female spikes 40-80 mm long, style 3-4, minute; ovary ovoid. Fruiting spike 12-20 mm diameter, yellow or orange when ripe. Fruit fleshy, sweet, coalescent, with dimpled apex. Seeds 1.8-2.0 mm long, ellipsoid, grooved with 3-4 furrows, hard, peppery when crushed.

### Flowering:

August - November

### Fruiting:

Throughout the year

### Threats:

Not Threatened. Listed because in New Zealand it is only known from Raoul Island, where it is abundant.

### \*Attribution:

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 30 August 2005. Description based on live plants (wild and cultivated) and herbarium specimens.

### References and further reading:

de Lange, P.J. 2012: Taxonomic notes on the New Zealand flora: new names in *Piper* (Piperaceae). *New Zealand Journal of Botany* DOI:10.1080/0028825X.2012.708904

Jaramillo, M.A.; Callejas, R; Davidson, C.; Smith, J.F.; Stevens, A.C.; Tepe, E.J. 2008: A phylogeny of the tropical genus *Piper* using ITS and the chloroplast intron psbJ-petA. *Systematic Botany* 33: 647-660.

### For more information, visit:

[http://nzpcn.org.nz/flora\\_details.asp?ID=580](http://nzpcn.org.nz/flora_details.asp?ID=580)



**Caption:** Raoul island

**Photographer:** John Barkla



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