



COPROSMA

Maori name: Karamu
Common name: Coprosma
Botanical name: *Coprosma robusta*

What does it look like?

Karamu is a shrub which grows to around five metres in height, with pale brown bark and sharp-pointed leathery leaves. The green flowers grow in dense heads and by autumn they turn into many small orange-coloured bitter fruit that attract birds. Karamu does not produce fruit until about three years after planting.

Where does it grow?

Karamu can be found as far north as Cape Reinga and as far south as North Otago or even Foveaux Strait, growing anywhere from sea level up to 1,200 metres. Often found where soil is poor or swampy or where conditions are windy or cold, it is a tough plant that will grow in difficult conditions. It tolerates full sun and shade equally well and is common in lowland and mountain forest. Karamu is wind hardy and frost tolerant when mature.

Growing tips . . . in your plant growing unit

Karamu doesn't need to be potted on from the root trainers, but it is important to keep pruning it during late summer/autumn so it doesn't get 'leggy' and spindly. Try to keep the plants to 30 cm height. Leggy plants do not grow as well as more compact forms when they are planted out, so regular trimming will help them establish.

Planting out for soil conservation

Karamu is one of the most useful plants for controlling soil erosion: it has been called the soil conservation workhorse. Karamu is suitable for general revegetation on bare infertile soils and provides good shelter for other more sensitive plants. A particularly hardy colonising species, it will grow well in moist or dry soils. Early growth is fast, so it provides good rapid shelter for other plants. Its dense, fibrous root system makes it good for stabilising soil.

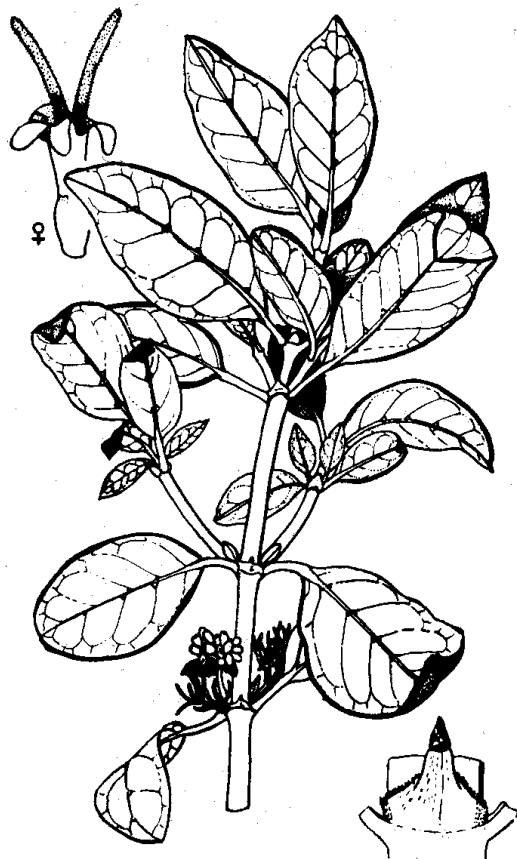
Used to ...

Maori made yellow dyes from a range of *Coprosma* species, while children ate the fruit in spite of their rather bitter taste.

Maori tohunga used branchlets of karamu in many religious and healing rites, including for ceremonies to lift the tapu from mother and child at childbirth and to ensure the success of the crop of kumara at planting time.

Did you know . . . ?

Karamu have both male and female plants which must grow near each other in order to produce berries and seeds. Worldwide there are over 90 species of *Coprosma*, of which 45 are found in New Zealand. *Coprosma* is in the Rubiaceae family which includes the beautiful gardenias and species that provide coffee and quinine, an anti-malarial substance.



Prepared by the Trees for Survival Trust, with the help of the Lotteries Grants Board. Schools may copy this material and use it for educational purposes.

Picture from Lindsay Poole and Nancy Adams, 1990. *Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand*, DSIR Publishing.