

Koromiko is noted for its pre-European history of use

The Koromiko is identified with Tunaranga, son of one of the great ancient Maori atua, Haumia Tiketike. This plant has always played an important part in ritual ceremonies as well as being widely known for its curative powers. The tohunga could call on both of its powers, supernatural and medicinal. He would take the patient to the sacred pool or stream of the village and there recite karakia requiring help from the atua responsible for the particular illness and to others watching over the sick person and tribe. Often the sufferer would be required to stand in the water in an act of purification, whilst the karakia proceeded, holding part of a koromiko or other sacred plant in his hand.

This is a beautiful low spreading shrub, the abundant flowers range in colour from white through pink and blue to purple and red according to their many varieties. The flowers come from the base of the leaves and look rather like a bottle brush, with their sweet scented flowers closely packed on a short stiff spike. Their glossy green leaves grow out from the stems at all angles. They are narrow, thick, single and about an inch in length. Nowhere else in the world does koromiko grow so well as in New Zealand and nowhere else are there so many varieties. They number nearly a hundred. Koromiko is found in both islands, but does best on the lower levels and in rich soil. In sparse country and in alpine regions this shrub has fewer and smaller leaves.

An infusion of the leaf acts as a powerful astringent and if chewed can promote hunger.

The astringent qualities of the young leaf tips were so well regarded by the Maoris as a cure for dysentery and diarrhoea that during World War 2 they sent them to the Maori troops in the Middle East who were suffering from these complaints. The leaves were eagerly accepted by their pakeha soldier comrades as well!

⇒ **The young tips and unopened buds are gathered and either chewed raw, but not swallowed, or the leaves were steeped and the liquid drunk for diarrhoea and dysentery..**

⇒ **Bay of Plenty Maori drank it to cure kidney and bladder trouble**

⇒ **An infusion was given to expectant mothers to bring on an easy and rapid childbirth.**

⇒ **Branches of koromiko formed part of a medicinal vapour or steam bath taken by women after child birth.**

1874 The roe of this fish (the kane or grey mullet), especially those caught on the sea coast, if eaten a fatal attack of dysentery would follow; and unless a sufficient quantity (say thirty or forty) of the pith-leaves of the twig-branches of the koromiko leaf were eaten, death would ensue.

Because this plant was so highly regarded for its medicinal purposes, the leaves used to be stored in gourds for later use by the Maori people.

There is a Koromiko garden located on level three of Starship Hospital in Auckland, for the patients and their families to enjoy. The name Koromiko was gifted through Starship's Maori Health team.