

Kumerahou is one of the strongest expectorants and antimicrobials with a particular indication for upper respiratory tract infections that are difficult to shift.

Historically:

Reverend Edgar Ward (1863 - 1934), who was also a qualified pharmacist; marketed a patent remedy called “Kuranui”. It was apparently made with Kumerahou, Koromiko and other unspecified herbs. The mixture was claimed to be a specific for tuberculosis and asthma. This was also told to me by an elderly lady by the name of Mrs Gay Edwards who knew of this product and reported it was sold in Clarks Pharmacy in Waihi (North Island, NZ) for “Miners Cough”.

The Maori traditionally planted the kumara when the kumerahou blossomed. “Gumdiggers soap” refers to the use in the gold fields of Northland where the plant was abundant. The flower head, when crushed in the hands and mixed with a little water produced a soapy lather. It was also very useful in the early days to clean the greasy oil off your hands when the car broke down.

“Poverty weed” another of its nicknames refers to the plants liking of poor clayey soils. It helps to build up nutrient levels in the soil.

It was used by the Maori in homebrew and also by the pakeha as a substitute for hops. “Golden Tainui” (*Pomaderris apetala*) was a name given the plant (golden due to the flower blossoms) and because it was believed to have sprung from the green boughs used in the canoe “Tainui”, one of the six famous canoes of the Great Heke.

Medicinally:

The leaves of Kumerahou are best known for their use in the form of a decoction or infusion for a wide variety of respiratory ailments. Bronchitis was treated with it at least as early as 1840, and various early writers reported its popularity as a cure for coughs and colds. It was also widely used earlier this century to treat tuberculosis, sometimes combined with Koromiko and other herbs. In the 1930’s it became popular in the treatment of asthma. Saponins are probably the main constituents responsible for Kumerahou’s reputed efficacy in these bronchial conditions, although these have yet to be characterized.

It was also said that it was a good blood cleanser, with a beneficial effect on the kidneys. Various reports exist in the early literature of a ‘blood purifying’ action by Kumerahou, and it was widely taken internally for skin diseases and as a general ‘tonic’, in addition to being applied topically. Alleged benefits on the kidneys and a gentle aperient action (an agent that acts as a mild laxative on the bowels), could account for increased elimination of metabolites and toxic material from the body.

Mix with mingimingi to make a very good tonic to help expel mucus from the respiratory tract. In 1933 Aunt Daisy recalled sugar bags of Kumerahou being bought into the studio and the office girls handing out portions to those suffering from rheumatism and wheezing with asthma.

It was also used in the bath, said to be good for the skin, especially for little children. Used in the treatment of arthritis by the Chinese in New Zealand.

A kumerahou infusion was also used for the stimulation of milk flow in nursing mothers.