



Kānuka *Kunzea ericoides*



Family Myrtaceae
Common name White tee-tree

Description Kānuka is indigenous to New Zealand and members of the species are found throughout New Zealand, occurring on the Three Kings Islands, Great Barrier Island, from the Aupouri Peninsular in the Far North, to as far south as Dunedin and Central Otago in the South Island and Stewart Island. Within this range Kānuka is widespread ranging from coastal scrub and sand dunes through lowland and montane forest, with one member of this complex reaching 2000 metres above sea level.



Kānuka often colonises land recovering after a fire and is a critical part of the natural recovery of open disturbed ground to forest. With its small but abundant flowers it can colour a whole hillside white, almost giving the appearance of snow cover. It is widespread particularly in coastal scrub and colonising land after a fire or reverting to a natural state after being used for agriculture. The wood is very hard and although not durable in the ground, it has been used for wharf piles and tool handles. It is particularly popular as firewood and burns with a great heat. In New Zealand Kānuka can grow to around 10m high. Kākāriki parakeets (*Cyanoramphus*) use the leaves and bark of Kānuka and the related Mānuka tee trees to rid themselves of parasites. Apart from ingesting the material, they also chew it, mix it with preen gland oil and apply it to their feathers.

Mānuka and Kānuka are superficially similar species and are often confused with one another. The easiest way to tell them apart is to feel the foliage, Kānuka leaves being soft, while Mānuka leaves are prickly.

Historical uses (Please refer to “Caution” below) Kānuka oil was used by the Maori, and is often sold in New Zealand and other countries as Tea Tree Oil for its anti-worm, anti-bacterial and insecticidal properties. Maori also used pounded seed capsules to make a poultice (dressing) for running sores.

The leaves were used in vapour baths. A decoction was taken for urinary and other internal complaints and also used as a febrifuge. The white gum was applied to scalds and burns. A decoction of the bark relieved diarrhoea and dysentery.

Leaves and bark were boiled and the decoction was applied to various parts of the body for various pains such as stiff backs.

Culinary use Place a large sprig on your lamb when roasting – a delicious aroma and a pleasant change from rosemary.

Medicinal uses (Please refer to “Caution” below) Kanaka essential oil is anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory and has a pleasant perfume. Kānuka essential oil can be used for the relief of swelling and muscular pain, for sprains, strains and sports injuries. It helps clear inflammation. Use it as a skin tonic and for relaxation.

Possible Pharmacological Actions²

Antibacterial – volatile oil
Antifungal – volatile oil
Antiviral (acyl-phloroglucinol derivatives, *in vitro*)
Astringent + haemostatic
Spasmolytic – volatile oil
Anti-inflammatory
Febrifuge
Diuretic

Dosage & precautions²

3-8ml per day of a 1:2 strength dried herb liquid extract, or 1.5 to 4g per day of the dried herb, in 1-3 divided doses.

Take away from meals with prolonged usage, to avoid possible tannin-mediated impairment of mineral absorption.

Constituents	α -Pinene	typically >600g/l
	α -Terpinene	typically >40g/l
	Liminene	typically >9g/l
	γ -Terpinene	typically >7g/l
	Leptospermone	typically >2g/l

Caution: Kānuka essential oil is a strong oil and generally should be diluted in a carrier oil. Use at very low strength with children as it may irritate their skin. Do not take internally unless under the supervision of a Medicinal Herbalist or other suitably qualified person. Keep out of reach of children.

It should not be used by pregnant or nursing women.

References

1. General information derived from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kunzea_ericoides
2. Reproduced with permission from “Therapeutic Uses of New Zealand Native Phytomedicines” July 2010, by Phil Rasmussen M.Pharm., M.P.S., Dip. Herb. Med, M.N.I.M.H.(UK), M.N.Z.A.M.H.

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Herb Federation of New Zealand’s Herb Awareness Week 2014
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