



TOETOE

Maori name: Toetoe
Common name: Toetoe
Botanical name: *Cortaderia* spp,

What does it look like?

Toetoe is New Zealand's largest native grass, growing in clumps up to 3 m in height. Toetoe is often called 'cutty grass' by children, because of the many fine, sharp teeth along the edges of the leaves, which are 3 - 5 cm wide. The flowers are white, feathery arching plumes that grow up to 6 m high. Toetoe is generally seen growing in groups of 5 or 6 clumps.

Where does it grow?

There are 4 species of toetoe which, between them, cover all of New Zealand. *C. fulvida* is found throughout the North Island, *C. richardii* is found throughout the South Island, *C. splendens* grows on sand dunes and cliff faces north of Kawhia and the Bay of Plenty, and *C. toetoe* is seen in the North Island, south of Auckland.

While generally classed as a coastal plant, toetoe will grow from sea level to an altitude of 600 metres or so, generally on the edges of swamps or streambanks. It will grow in damp or dry soils, and tolerates strong winds and salt. Nowadays it is most commonly seen on sand dunes and roadsides, although it is sometimes confused with the introduced pampas grass.

Growing tips - in your plant growing unit

Take care in the Plant Growing Unit that the rough edged leaves of the plant as it gets older don't damage the foliage of more tender neighbouring plants.

Planting out for Soil Conservation

Toetoe are great for use in revegetating slips, earthworks and other freshly exposed soil in moist habitats throughout their respective ranges. They can be used to provide shelter in exposed conditions, to minimise stream bank erosion, and can be planted to help maintain the stability of sand dunes.

Used To

Maori used the toetoe leaves to make baskets, kites, mats, wall linings and roof thatching. It was

also used to make containers to cook food in hot springs. The flower stalks were also useful - as frames for kites, and in tukutuku panelling. The seed heads themselves were used on fresh wounds to stop bleeding. Other medicinal uses included treatment of diarrhoea, kidney Complaints, and burns.

Early Pakeha settlers also used the toetoe to thatch their house roof - although this wasn't recommended for town houses because of the fire hazard! Today the feathery plumes are often found decorating a lounge or entrance hallway.

Did you know?

Do not confuse Toetoe with the introduced species of pampas grass, which is a troublesome weed in many places. Our native toetoe grasses flower in spring and summer, while the pampas flowers in the autumn. Pampas also has tightly curled dead leaves at its base, and the leaves snap readily when given a sharp tug (toetoe leaves do not).



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