



MAHOE

Maori name: Mahoe
Common name: Whiteywood
Botanical name: *Melicytus ramiflorus*

What does it look like?

Mahoe is best identified by the smooth, pale bark and branches that are often covered in patches of white lichen - hence the name 'Whiteywood'. It grows into a large shrub or spreading tree up to 10 metres high, with many branches from the trunk. The bright green leaves are up to 15 cm long, and 5 cm wide, with serrated edges. The tiny greenish-yellow flowers found in early summer are beautifully scented, and grow out straight from the branches. In autumn the branches of female trees bear masses of small purple berries, provided there is a male tree close by.

Where does it grow?

Mahoe is common throughout New Zealand from sea level to mountain forests. It is usually found in open areas, on the edge of forest, in gullies and streamside areas. It grows best in well drained and reasonably fertile soils, and prefers a moist climate. Although it can tolerate exposed sites, it will become very misshapened by strong winds. Mahoe can't tolerate heavy frosts, but it will recover from mild frost damage. Mahoe is not only found in New Zealand, but also on Norfolk, Tonga and the Fiji Islands.

Growing tips - in your plant growing unit

Keep the Mahoe well watered, and trim the tops of the plants in late summer or autumn to keep to 30 cm growth. Leggy plants do not grow as well as more compact forms, so regular trimming will help them establish.

Planting out for Soil Conservation

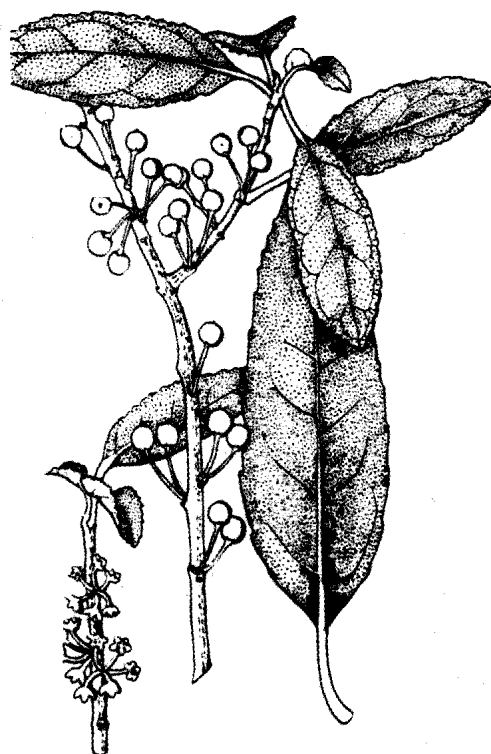
Mahoe is not well suited to planting on fresh erosion scars, as it does not do well on infertile soils. It is best suited to riparian planting - along streams to prevent stream bank erosion and to shade the stream and improve water quality. But it must be planted far enough back from the stream to be in well drained soil - and far enough away from the fence so that stock won't eat the highly palatable leaves.

Used To

The main use of the Mahoe to the early Maori was in the friction method of fire lighting. A slab of soft Mahoe was one of the best woods for scraping with a pointed stick of the harder Totara or kaikomako to make a flame. The timber itself is brittle and useful only as firewood. Early Pakeha burned Mahoe to produce charcoal to make certain kinds of gunpowder. Maori used liquid from the boiled leaves for rheumatism and scabies, and the inner bark was used to soothe burns.

Did you know?

We can learn a lot about the plants from their name - especially if we understand latin! Although the flowers of the Mahoe smell beautiful, they do not have any nectar. Hence the 'Melicytus' in the name, which literally means 'no honey'.



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

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