



TAWA (*BEILSCHMIEDIA TAWA*)

Tawa is an evergreen member of the laurel family, and Tawa forest is still comparatively extensive in the centre of the North Island, and much is likely to remain because of steep topography or high elevations, but is found in lowland to lower mountain forests from almost the North Cape to the Seaward Kaikoura Range in the South Island.

The tree grows to medium sizes, 25 metres tall and with a trunk up to a metre in diameter, with a smooth, even-textured bark, but often with a highly irregular cross-sectional shape. Tawa and Taraire (*Beilschmiedia tarairi*, related to the Tawa) have large purplish berries relished by kereru (native pigeons). Taraire, being similar in size and form, grows in the north of the North Island, but its wood tends to be pinker than Tawa.

Tawa was prized by Māori for long bird spears, waka paddles, and roof and wall battens. Early European colonists used it for butter churns and in the dairy industry.

Tawa is used commercially, principally for furniture and flooring, though it requires preservative treatment to protect it from the common house borer, and it is difficult to nail. It is a white, straight grained wood with excellent strength, hardness and finishes well. Fresh-cut wood needs to be dried, fillet stacked, or treated immediately or discolouration of the white timber (sap-stain) can occur. It is decorative when kiln-dried, and was commonly used for turned handles, rollers, clothes pegs, furniture, interior finishes, weatherboarding, and framing.

The natural dark heart lines, or the dark lines running through the white timber when spalted, make Tawa especially attractive for woodturning.

Possible health risks: none known
Density 720 kg/m³



*The evergreen Tawa has berries relished by kereru.
Photo: J L Kendrick, DOC*

