Maori Rongoa

Medicinal Native Plants of New Zealand

Contents

Traditional Maori Healing

In traditional times before the colonisation of New Zealand, Maori saw science and religion as the same entity and believed that illnesses were caused by supernatural sources. Maori had a good concept of anatomy, physiology and the use of plants for healing, however there was an undefined distinction between the mind and body.

The tohunga was the traditional Maori healer and thought of as a priestly expert and a professional in a particular field of human endeavor such as art, agriculture, warfare, fishing and healing. Tohunga were essential in traditional Maori society because of the importance of religion in their everyday life. They were trained in the whare wananga (house of learning) and only the most intelligent students were chosen to become tohunga. Tohunga were perceived as the mediator between spirits so were important in healing the sick. Tohunga would use spiritual healing and herbal medicines and saw no distinction between the two methods. They believed that the use of one was not effective without the other as they were both parts of a complete treatment.

Maori believed an evil spirit or a type of witchcraft would attack an individual to cause ill-health as a punishment for breaking the tapu (sacred restriction) of the family that the spirit belonged to. This type of illness was called mate atua (disease of the gods) since there was no obvious physical cause. The individual would experience pain, weakness, loss of appetite, malaise, fever and occasionally delirium due to possession of the spirit.

The tohunga would investigate the cause of sickness by taking a history of the patient's activities before becoming ill or by analyzing their dreams or the dreams of the patient's family to obtain a diagnosis. Spiritual healing using karakia (incantations) for particular illnesses were performed with or without the use of herbs. If the cause of illness was found to be due to the patient breaking another family's tapu, the tohunga and the head of the patient's family would address the spirit and the head of their family. An apology would follow so that the spirit would leave and the patient would recover. Maori also believed that there were illnesses that were caused by makutu (witchcraft) that would result in the death of the patient unless the tohunga could return the spell onto the person responsible for casting it. This would then cause the death of the sorcerer and the recovery of the patient.

Herbal medicines, minor surgery or mirimiri (massage) were used to treat illnesses that were obviously due to physical causes. This type of treatment was limited because of the belief that illness was of spiritual origin.

The Impact of Colonisation

The arrival of the European settlers to New Zealand had a huge impact on the health of the Maori people. The introduction of new weapons (for example, the musket) and especially infectious diseases saw the decrease of the Maori population to a level where it was thought that the Maori race would become extinct. New Zealand's isolation meant that the Maori people to lacked immunity to bacterial and viral infections that were common in other countries.

Tohunga found their methods hopeless against these new diseases and found that the Maori people began to lose confidence with the introduction of Western medicine and

Christianity. With the introduction of internal medicines, Maori began to develop their own knowledge about herbal remedies and experiment with native plants. The effectiveness (although still ineffective at this stage of development) and popularity of the missionaries medicines assisted in the conversion of Maori to Christianity. It appeared to the Maori that the Christian god had superior powers and this attributed to the health and prosperity of the Europeans. The fundamentals of Maori society, culture, religion and medicine became strained as religion was involved in their everyday lives and many of their beliefs were based upon it. The tohunga began to lose his mana (power, authority and prestige) due to the shift of religion and the spread of Western knowledge undermining the tohunga's authority The downfall of the whare wananga (school of learning) was also due to conflict between Maori religion and Christianity.

The Maori people never fully lost faith in their own healers and did not fully accept Western medicine due to poor access to medical facilities and the cost of travel and services. Western medicine was also not very effective at the time. Many Maori would still turn to their local tohunga for medical treatment.

The Tohunga Supression Act was passed in 1907 due to concern that was being raised over the practice and safety of some tohunga. After the collapse of the traditional tohunga, another type of healer took advantage of the vulnerable position the Maori people were faced with. These healers were considered by many to be motivated by greed and were seen as a threat to both Maori and Pakeha. Maori healing was also seen as 'dangerous' by Western modern medicine as it was not scientifically proven. The Tohunga Suppression Act was repealed in 1962 however this had little significance as some tohunga had practiced throughout the 20th century especially in remote rural areas of the country.

Current Rongoa Maori

The traditional beliefs of Maori healing and healthcare have become increasingly popular over the last 20 years and traditional healing techniques are being incorporated into the services of Maori health providers. The repeal of the Tohunga Supression Act, the increased popularity of traditional and alternative medicine, the failure to improve Maori health status and issues with primary health care such as access, cost and cultural beliefs may have contributed to the increasing demand for traditional Maori healing methods. Maori healing has been an alternative method of health care when conventional medicine has been unsuccessful. Current practice of traditional Maori healing aims to work with conventional health care to enhance healthcare services.

Tohunga are still significant in current rongoa Maori however modern tohunga have not been trained in traditional methods giving them a position of authority and prestige however they are still recognized as experts in their field. Many modern tohunga showed potential in their childhood by spending time with their elders and learning tribal and cultural lore. They then became an apprentice under an established tohunga to learn their expertise.

Current Maori healthcare is based on a holistic model that incorporates the physical, emotional, family and spiritual aspects of health. Each aspect must be treated or used to ensure full recovery of a patient. The current function of modern tohunga is varied. Conventional medicine is incorporated into the tohunga's practice however traditional methods of karakia (chants) and inoi (prayer) are still extensively used. Native plants for medicinal purposes are widely used however application of uses varies between each practitioner.

Harakeke

Maori names: Harakeke, korari
Common name: New Zealand flax
Botanical name: *Phorium tenax*

Origin and general information:

Harakeke is found throughout New Zealand, especially in lowland swamps.

Rongoa:

Spiritual healing:

The flax leaves played a particularly important role in spiritual healing of the Maori. Flax leaves were used by the Maori priest to determine the health of his patient and also to attempt to persuade an evil presence situated in a patients' body to leave. Strips of flax were bound around the limbs and body of the patient and then the Maori priest said the "hirihiri atua" karakia to drive out an evil presence.

If a blade of flax was pulled from a flax clump and it made a screeching sound, this was considered a good omen and signified that the patient would recover. This ritual was also performed before fishing expeditions with a screeching sound indicating many fish would be caught.

In another example of the spiritual importance of harakeke, a flax leaf was suspended directly over a dying patients' mouth as a path for their last breath. The knotted ends of flax leaves that had been twisted together by the wind signified the passing by of the spirit of a departed person.

Dermatological complaints:

The leaf or root of the harakeke plant was beaten into a poultice and heated or roasted. The hot poultice was then applied to bring abscesses or tumours where they were starting to form in an attempt to bring them forward to the surface of the skin. The poultice was also used to help reduce swelling of the joints or limbs. Fresh harakeke root was pounded and the juice used as a lotion to treat ringworm. It was also used on infants to prevent skin irritations. Alternatively gum from the harakeke plant was also directly applied to the affected area to treat ringworm. To treat chillblains and abcesses, the root was soaked, roasted and then made into a pulp which was applied to the affected area.

Binding and bandaging:

The strength of the harakeke leaves made them ideal for a number of other situations including splints for broken limbs, strapping sore backs, tying umbilical cords, sewing stitches and binding cuts and wounds.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The juice of the root was drunk with the oil of kohia berry to treat flatulence. To treat constipation, harakeke root was crushed with some water and then heated in a paua or pupu shell and given by mouth. Alternatively roots could be chewed and swallowed to treat constipation. To create a purgative, roots were bruised, steeped in water, then drunk. To treat complaints such as diarrhoea and dysentery, the root was washed, cut into pieces and boiled in water for 30 minutes. It was then strained and sweetened if desired. One tablespoon was taken one to three times a day as required.

Musculoskeletal complaints:

The base of the leaf was steamed and infused and the gum was used as an ointment to heal the pain of rheumatism.

Pregnancy:

Harakeke root, thistle root, plantain weed, tutumako and dock root were boiled together for 3 hours and drunk after the delivery of the baby to help expel the placenta. Alternatively, a concoction of tataramoa and harakeke was used to cause abortion.

Blood purifier:

The root was cut up and boiled for two hours. The water was then strained out and one tablespoon twice a day was given to purify the blood.

Wounds and bruising:

Harakeke gum was applied to wounds, burns and scalds and was also useful for sunburn. To treat minor cuts, cracked skin and chafing, gum was applied directly to the affected area.

Genitourinary complaints:

The red juice obtained from the base of the flax leaves was used to treat gonorrhoea in the Rangatikei district.

Other rongoa uses:

To treat toothache, juice from the Harakeke root was poured into the ear giving the patient a cold shiver and the toothache would be gone in about minutes. The flax gum was also stuffed into the holes of molars to treat toothache.

Alternative Uses:

It was mainly grown for its fibre (leaves) to make clothing, matting, baskets and sandals. The juice of the root was also used as ink and the gum as glue for sealing letters.

Chemistry:

The harakeke rhizome has been shown to contain a red crystalline substance and is thought to be a purgative anthraquinone.

Hoiheri

Maori name: Hoiheri, Houhere
Common name: Lacebark
Botanical name: *Hoheria populnea*

Origin and general information:

Hoiheri gets its name from the pattern of the plant's inner bark that has a lace like appearance.

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

The bark, after being beat with rocks could be applied to the skin as a poultice for common skin aliments . When the inner bark of the hoiheri plant was mixed with the sap of the harakeke (flax) this mixture was very effective against burns .

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The main internal use of hoiheri was as a demulcent. For this it would be infused with hot water and the infusion given by mouth. This infusion was also drunk in suspected poisoning cases when poisoned with katipo, karaka or tutu, to cause the poisoned person to perspire . A more concentrated version of this infusion was used to keep a fever down.

Other rongoa uses:

To treat sore or weeping eyes, bark was soaked in cold water forming a jelly like mixture which was then applied to the affected area.

Alternative Uses:

Maori women used lacebark as a headband, wearing a strip of the bark around their heads . The strength of hoiheri bark also led to its use in ropes and nets.

Huika

Maori name: Huika
Common name:
Botanical name: *Geranium pilosum*

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

Huika leaves were warmed over a fire and the juice then squeezed out to make a poultice that could then be applied to boils.

Wounds and bruising:

The plant was chewed into a poultice and applied to wounds. Huika has been reported to be especially effective for badly septic wounds.

Respiratory complaints:

Huika has been used to treat colds.

Other rongoa uses:

Huika is useful as an astringent and has been used to treat sore gums and diarrhoea.

Kahikatea

Maori name: Kahikatea
Common name: White pine
Botanical name: *Podocarpus dacrydiodes*

Origin and general information:

The Kahikatea tree grows to a height of between 80 and 100 feet in swampy areas throughout the North and South Islands of New Zealand.

Rongoa:

Wounds and bruising:

The leaves of the kahikatea tree were boiled and then applied to the affected area to treat bruising.

Genitourinary complaints:

The berries of the kahikatea tree have diuretic properties and boiled leaves were taken for urinary complaints.

Bleeding mouths:

The hard wood of the kahikatea tree can be used to relieve pain and stop bleeding of the mouth. The wood is beaten until bruised then added to a soapy water solution and sweetened with sugar before it is given by mouth.

Alternative Uses:

Many kahikatea trees symbolise life, and when a Maori child was born their naval string (umbilical cord) was buried and a kahikatea sapling was planted above the burial site. Also, the hard wood of the kahikatea tree was used as a comb and as a needle for tattooing.

Kanuka

Maori name: Kanuka
Common name: Tea Tree
Botanical name: *Kunzea ericoides*

Origin and general information:

Kanuka is commonly found in lowland areas throughout mountain scrub and on the borders of forests in the North and South Islands of New Zealand. It grows to a height of 15 metres and has loose papery bark. Small white flowers appear from September to February. Both Manuka and Kanuka were used extensively for medicinal purposes by the Maori and later by European settlers.

Rongoa:

Gastrointestinal complaints:

Twelve similar sized pieces of kanuka bark were boiled until the water turned dark and then given by mouth to treat diarrhoea and dysentery. Young shoots could also be chewed to treat dysentery.

Genitourinary complaints:

The tips of kanuka were boiled together with manono bark and applied to the affected area to treat venereal diseases such as gonorrhoea.

Wounds and bruising:

Kanuka seeds were boiled and the resulting fluid was used as an anti-inflammatory cream. Bark was also used for pain relief and to help promote healing of fractures. Also, the white gum of the kanuka tree was applied to wounds or burns.

Respiratory complaints:

The leaves were boiled in water and the vapour inhaled to treat head colds. Gum obtained from the tree was chewed to ease coughing.

Pregnancy:

Kanuka bark was boiled was boiled in water and the infusion used to treat inflamed breasts.

Other rongoa uses:

The bark was infused in water and given internally as a sedative to help with sleep.

Alternative uses:

The wood of the kanuka was used to make many things, such as paddles, weapons and tools. The leaves were also used to scent oil.

Chemistry:

Kanuka contains leptospermone that is known to possess antihelmintic properties. Other substituents include triterpene acid in the bark, ursolic acid acetate, ellagic acis and O-methyl ethers of ellagic acid.

Karamu

Maori name: Karamu
Common name: Karamu
Botanical name: *Coprosma robusta*

Origin and general information:

Karamu has glossy leaves and small red berries and is widely found in forests and forest margins throughout New Zealand.

Rongoa:

Spiritual Healing:

Karamu was used in many Maori ceremonies including spiritual healing rituals. A twig of Karamu was placed on the ground in front of the patient and then an incantation was performed to cure the disease. An apron of karamu and kawakawa twigs was worn by the tohunga (Maori priest) while he performed incantations to give sight to the blind. Karamu was also used in birth ceremonies, baptism and child naming ceremonies.

Dermatological complaints:

An ointment (called Hapete ointment) containing karamu, natanata, kormiko and pukatea was applied to the affected area to treat scrofula, sores and boils.

Musculoskeletal complaints:

The inner bark of the karamu branch was placed in cold water and the liquid applied to aches and pains. To treat broken limbs, karamu leaves and twigs were boiled and the liquid extract applied to the broken limb.

Genitourinary complaints:

Karamu and kawakawa were boiled together and the extract drunk to relieve urinary problems. Young karamu shoots were also boiled and the extract given to relieve bladder inflammation. Karamu, harakeke root and tataramoa vine were each scraped, grated and pounded and then cooked together in a pot with water. The resulting extract was then sweetened with sugar if required and drunken to relieve bowel, urinary and menstrual problems.

Respiratory complaints:

Karamu bark was boiled and the extract given orally to treat colds.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The outside bark of karamu was scraped off and the inner bark covered with water and boiled for 15 minutes. An adult would drink half a teacup of the extract and a baby would drink 1 teaspoon for stomach ache or nausea.

Kidney problems:

Maori from the Northland region boiled leaves in water and then drank the extract to treat kidney problems.

Chemistry:

The colouring of the bark contains anthraquinone derivatives which are related to dihydroxyanthraquinone, a synthetic purgative.

Kareao

Maori names: Kareao/Karewao/Pirita
Common name: Supplejack
Botanical name: *Ripogonum scandens*

Origin and general information:

Kareao is a climbing vine that populates most lowland forests in New Zealand. It produces many shoots that entangle each other as they compete for sunlight making it very dense and difficult to pass through. The Maori name (kareao) translates as “twisting rope”**.** Kareao also produces edible shiny red berries .

Rongoa:

Wounds and bruises:

Sap from young shoots was placed on wounds and cuts to stop bleeding **.** The root also could be crushed and used for this purpose . An infusion of the root was also useful when applied to rheumatic or painful joints .

Blood purifier:

Early European settlers used to drink leaves infused in water as a substitute for sarsaparilla. It was used to purify the blood and as a general tonic . Generally it was taken in small doses, and had the ability to purify the blood, relieve congestion of the chest cold while helping the sore throat, treating urinary complaints and skin problems such as rashes.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

If an infusion of leaves in water is made stronger it can have laxative effects.

Other rongoa uses:

In very large doses, an infusion of kareao leaves was occasionally used as an abortifacient .

Alternative Uses:

The strength of kareao vines meant that is was used as an alternative to flax for binding (for example, carrying firewood) and pulling purposes (for example, towing canoes)**.**

Kawakawa

Maori name: Kawakawa
Common name: Pepper tree
Botanical name: *Macropiper excesum*

Origin and general information:

Kawakawa is primarily found around the North Island of New Zealand, but has been found as far south as banks peninsular. It grows to a height of 14 - 20 feet and has easily distinguishable heart-shaped leaves. It also has edible orange fruit which are present most of the year and a narrow seed containing cob.

Rongoa:

Genitourinary complaints:

To treat gonorrhoea and syphilis kawakawa leaves and sticks were burnt in a fire with the patient in the smoke then water was placed on the fire steaming the infection . The leaves and twigs could be boiled and given orally as an alternative .

Dermatological complaints:

The patient was steamed (see above), or alternatively kawakawa could be boiled with origaonga (free nettle) and then used as a bath . Paipai was a common skin condition of the Maori that resembled ringworm. Treatment of this ailment with kawakawa was done using steaming (see method above). Boils were treated with kawakawa as it was considered an astringent. Patients would usually be treated with a kawakawa infusion given by mouth night and day for 3 days.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

Stomach pains were treated with kawakawa. The leaves and bark were taken orally . The root was also chewed to stop cure dysentery.

Musculoskeletal complaints:

Kawakawa leaves were boiled and a patient would then bathe in the remaining liquid as a treatment for rheumatism and arthritis.

Wounds and bruising:

Kawakawa leaves would be roasted producing a juice which was placed on the wound . The wound could also be bound up with fresh leaf/leaves which hastened the healing process . To treat bruises, kawakawa leaves were boiled and then placed onto the bruise as hot as the patient could stand .

Genitourinary complaints:

An infusion made from boiled leaves was given by mouth as a diuretic. Karamu was often added to enhance diuresis.

Respiratory complaints:

Maori would frequently have an infusion of kawakawa leaves on the fire in winter to take by mouth to treat chest troubles.

Other rongoa uses:

Toothache/swollen mouth or cheeks: leaves were crushed into a poultice and placesd over the affected area . Leaves and fruit were also commonly chewed to for toothache .

Kohekohe

Maori name: Kohekohe
Common name: Native cedar
Botanical name: *Dysoxylum Spectabile*

Origin and general information:

The Kohekohe grows on costal regions of the North Island and northern parts of the South Island and can grow to a height of 15 meters. During June kohekohe produces small white flowers which grow into thick leathery orange-red fruit that contain scarlet coloured seeds. The leaves, bark and fruit of the kohekohe provide a range of medicinal uses including treating colds, sore throats, tuberculosis, haemorrhages, boils and infected wounds .

Rongoa:

Respiratory complaints:

Kohekohe leaves were boiled and the liquid was then used as a gargle for sore throats and an inhalation for colds and fevers.

Wounds and bruising:

The boiled levels themselves served as a poultice for infected wounds.

Dermatological complaints:

The extract obtained from boiled kohekohe leaves was used as a wash for boils.

Bleeding problems:

Kokhekoe bark along with, manakura bark, kahikatoa leaves, puawananga vine, and korari stalks; was a recipe used to treat female menstruation, bleeding piles, and general blood disorders.

Chemistry:

The bark and wood of the kohekohe contains beta-sitosterol, tannins, glycerine oil, and catechin which are useful in treating sore throats and diarrhoea.

Kohia

Maori name: Kohia
Common name: New Zealand passion fruit
Botanical name: *Passiflora tetrandra*

Origin and General Information

Kohia, also known as New Zealand passionfruit, is a vine which often clings to the highest trees in the forest canopy. It is a slender climber with glossy leaves, greenish-white sweet scented flowers and grows bright orange grape-sized berries. The fruit is very fragrant and filled with oil. It was said by Taylor that people could smell it a quarter of a mile off because it was so extremely fragrant.

Rongoa:

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The oil from the fruit was mixed in equal proportions with the juice of the harakeke (flax) root and taken by mouth to cure flatulence.

Wounds and bruising:

Oil obtained from the seeds of the fruit can be used to soothe wounds that have not healed for some time. Oil can also be pressed from the seeds by bruising them into a pulp and cooking them in a Maori oven. During spring oil can be obtained by pricking the bark on the side of the tree which faces west.

Other complaints:

Oil obtained from the fruit can also be used by women who have sore nipples or hard or swollen breasts. Bennett discovered that a treatment for rheumatic fever was rubbing the oil over swollen joints.

Kohukohu

Maori name: Kohukohu
Common name: Chickweed
Botanical Name: *Stellaria media*

Origin and General Information:

Kohukohu, also known as chickweed, was the only weed that grew on the kumara fields. It was never harvested because it was thought to be an excellent fertiliser. It should be noted that there are mosses named kohukohu, and these should not be confused with chickweed. Kohukohu is rich in minerals and proteins and this may account for its medicinal properties. Kohukohu is well-known for being used as a poultice, an eyewash, as an expectorant, as a blood cleanser, for rheumatism, skin diseases and bruises, by the Maori.

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

Kohukohu leaves were warmed on live embers and applied to the affected area of skin diseases.

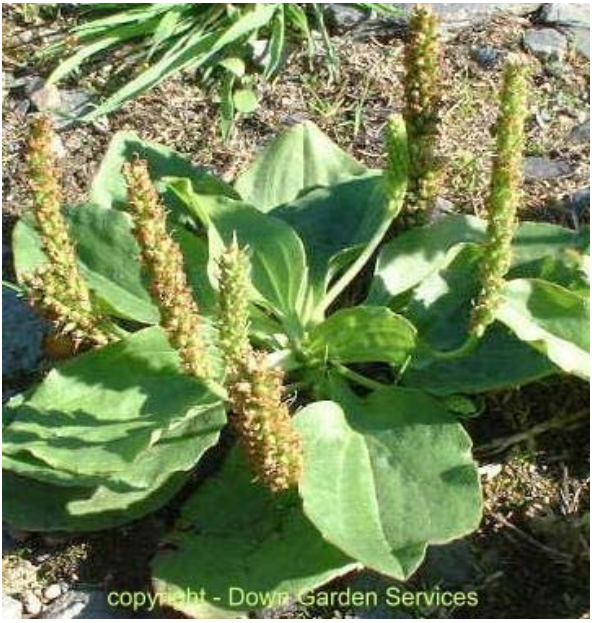
Wounds and bruising:

The following mixture was made: Harakeke (flax) root, twelve leaves from the kohukohu, five leaves of the mahoutou (possibly kotukutuku – fuschia) and plenty of water. This was then boiled, the mixture strained and then cooled. It was then given internally to treat bruises.

Other rongoa uses:

Kohukohu was used for diseases of the ear. The plant was boiled and the steam that was produced was guided into the ear canal with a funnel.

Kopakopa



Maori name: Kopakopa
Common name: Plantain
Botanical name: *Plantego major*

Origin and General Information:

There are a number of indigenous species of this plant, as well as the introduced European variety. Kopakopa is a common plant found in most areas throughout New Zealand and is considered to be a weed. It has broad, flat leaves that grow out along the ground, with a flower head of tall purple stamens shooting out from the middle.

Rongoa:

Wounds and bruising:

Kopakopa leaves have the ability to draw poison from a wound. First, the wound is made to bleed. Leaves are then heated over the hot embers of a fire and the upper sides of the leaves are placed over the bleeding wound. When the wound began to heal the under sides of the leaves were placed next to the skin, as this had a soothing effect. Alternatively, the pale, green leaves could be wrung out and the exuding juice applied to the wound.

Pregnancy:

After birth, leaves from of the kopakopa were warmed and applied to the mother's vagina, are they were useful in treating pain after childbirth. Also, the leaves and clover of the kopakopa were boiled together with sow thistles and the extract was given by mouth as a uterine stimulant to expel the placenta after childbirth.

Dermatological complaints:

Kopakopa leaves were bruised and applied to the affected area to treat burns and boils.

Genitourinary complaints:

Kopakopa leaves were boiled and the resulting liquid and steam was used to treat piles. Patients either bathed in the liquid or crouched over the boiling liquid, known as a steam bath.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

To treat stomach pains kopakopa leaves were boiled and the extracted liquid was consumed by mouth.

Koromiko

Maori Name: Koromiko
Common name: Hebe
Botanical name: *Hebe salicifolia*

Origin and general information:

Koromiko is a plant used by the Maori for a number of medicinal purposes. It is placed under the genus Hebe referring to a large leaved shrub found in both the South Island and Stewart Island of New Zealand. It is thought to have first been discovered by settlers in the Dusky Sound during one of Captain Cook's voyages. The plant is a low spreading shrub and flowers in a number of different colours. It has glossy green leaves and grows best on lower levels in rich soil.

Rongoa:

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The tender shoots were used to relieve stomach aches. The ends of the leaves were chewed and used for the treatment of diarrhoea. An infusion of the leaf acts as a powerful astringent and if chewed can promote hunger.

Dermatological complaints:

Tender leaves were are picked and applied as a poultice for ulcers; this method was also used for the pakiwhara – venereal disease. The stick from the koromiko was used to pierce an injury to the skin from a wooden lance. A preparation of the plant was used in the treatment of hawaniwani, a skin disease affecting children.

Pregnancy:

The leaves were pressed between the legs into the woman's vagina if haemorrhage was present.

Kowhai

Maori name: Kowhai
Common name: Kowhai
Botanical names: *Sophora tetraptera* (“large-leaved”)
Sophora mircophylla (“small-leaved”)

Origin and General Information:

Kowhai is renowned for its magnificent drooping bright yellow flowers and distinctive seed pods. It is found throughout New Zealand in forest margins and beside rivers, both on the coast and in inland open areas. There are two types of kowhai, the large-leaved S. tetraptera variety and the short-leaved S. microphylla variety. The rongoa described applies to both species.

Rongoa:

Wounds and bruising:

To treat bruises bark from the tree was crushed and steeped in boiling water for some hours. Severe bruises were bathed in the liquid. Kowhai was particularly useful for treating wounds. The leaves were boiled in water and the wound then bathed in the extract before being bandaged with the boiled leaves.

Dermatological complaints:

For an itch the Maori made an infusion of the inner bark of the kowhai and applied it to the affected skin. To treat ringworm the burnt ashy remains of the kowhai were rubbed over their heads to supposedly treat ringworm.

Genitourinary complaints:

Kowhai was often used to treat gonorrhoea. Firstly, a tree was found growing on a hillside and a root running towards the sun located (this root was believed to have less but more potent juice). The outer skin of the root was scraped away, as was the next layer of skin leaving the central core. The juice was extracted from this and a small spoonful was administered three times daily to rid gonorrhoea.

Musculoskeletal complaints:

To treat back-aches, kowhai and manuka bark were boiled together and the liquid extract was then rubbed over the patient’s back. To treat internal pains the mixture for back-aches was also consumed by mouth.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

To treat abdominal pains bark is stripped from the tree and hung in the Whare to dry thoroughly and a bark tea is made by steeping the bark in hot water. To produce a purgative the inner bark was pounded, boiled and cooked with kumara and the resulting mixture was consumed by mouth.

Respiratory complaints:

To treat colds and sore throats bark of the kowhai tree is steeped in boiling water and the infusion is consumed by mouth. The infusion does not keep so must be consumed as soon as it has been prepared.

Other rongoa uses:

To prevent and soothe toothache the barks of ngaio, kowhai and poananga were steeped in hot water. A mouthful was given, often to children, to swirl around their mouth and spit out. To relieve pain from shingles, the kowhai bark is boiled and consumed by mouth.

Kumarahou

Maori name: Kumarahou,
Common name: Gumdigger's soap, poverty weed.
Botanical name: *Pomaderris kumeraho*

Origin and general information:

Kumarahou is an attractive ornamental shrub that grows extensively on the gumfields of the North Island and in the scrub on the edges of roads. When the yellow head of the flower is crushed in the hands and mixed with water it produces a soapy lather, accounting for the name "gumdigger's soap". It is also known as poverty weed as the plant has a liking for poor, clay-like soils. The leaves have good curative properties which are widely known and authenticated.

Rongoa:

Respiratory complaints:

The liquid extract obtained by steeping the leaves in water was used for the relief of chest complaints. The liquid was also taken internally for colds and asthma, and in particular for bronchitis. Extracts of kumarahou were also drunk to treat tuberculosis.

Wounds and bruising:

The outer surface of kumarahou leaves can be easily rubbed off and boiled. The liquid obtained can be used as a soothing agent that can be applied to wounds.

Blood purifier:

It was used as a blood purifier.

Dermatological complaints:

The liquid obtained from steeping the leaves in boiling water was used with good effect as a bath for skin disorders, especially for children.

Kidney problems:

A bath full of kumarahou leaves was given to people suffering from kidney problems.

Alternative uses:

The bitter taste of kumarahou as a medicine has led to its use by the Maori in paikaka (homebrew).

Mamuku

Maori name: Mamaku
Common name: Black tree fern
Botanical name: *Cyathea medullaris*

Origin and general information:

Mamuku is commonly found throughout the north and south islands of New Zealand.

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

To treat pus eruptions and boils, the exterior covering of the trunk, just below the young fronds, was stripped away and the material under it removed. This material was then crushed, wrapped up and heated then placed on the affected area. This poultice was changed every four hours.

Wounds and bruising:

The pith of the mamaku was applied raw to sores and areas of chafing as a dressing. The hairy outer skin of the inner curled frond was scraped off and the slimy tissue underneath then rubbed onto a wound up to three times a day. The gum was also applied to cuts to stop bleeding.

Pregnancy:

The young coiled shoots were boiled and drunk to help remove the placenta after childbirth. A poultice made from young fern fronds was used for inflamed breasts. The fern stem is split and the pith removed to make the poultice.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

A concoction of mamaku, ngaio, kapuka, piupiu and kawakawa was used to treat a sore stomach. The mixture was boiled and given by mouth, and then the patient would lie on an earth oven and be covered with soil so that they were surrounded by steam. This was repeated until the patient is cured. The gum was also chewed and found to be useful in treating diarrhoea .

Other rongoa uses:

Swollen feet or eyes: The bruised pith of the main stem was applied to feet and eyes as a poultice. Swelling may have been due to debility, dropsy, rheumatism or travel fatigue,. The slimy tissue beneath the skin of the fern was also used in a solution to bathe swollen feet or was rubbed directly onto the feet. The juice from this poultice was also used as a lotion for weak, sore or inflamed eyes.

Manuka

Maori name: Manuka
Common names: Tea tree, red manuka, white manuka
Botanical name: *Leptospermum scopium/ericoides*

Origin and general information:

Manuka is a small tree that can found throughout New Zealand as two native varieties, red and white. The difference can be found in the colour of the wood; red manuka being red and white manuka being white. When compared with red manuka, white manuka grows higher, has smaller scented leaves and flowers and the seed capsule is slightly sunken . Generally white manuka was preferred by the maori .

Rongoa:

Wounds and bruises:

Both varieties have seedpods with a distinct head that is divided into sections . The seed pods were crushed and dried then sprinkled over a seeping or open wound to dry it out and encourage healing **.** The seeds could also be boiled in water and the liquid extract could be applied externally for bruises and inflammation .

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The seed pods were boiled and the liquid extract taken by mouth to treat diarrhoea, dysentery or stomach complaints . Chewing the young shoots of the plants was also a treatment for dysentery. When chewed the seeds could also be used for colic – to seeds would be chewed every minutes until the pain subsided . Manuka bark was also boiled in water until the water turned dark and then taken by mouth to treat constipation

Genitourinary complaints:

The leaves could also be combined with the seed capsules and boiled and crushed and the liquid taken by mouth to treat kidney, urinary or rheumatism complaints .

Respiratory complaints:

When the leaves and seed pods are boiled in water the resulting infusion is very fragrant and was often inhaled when a patient had a cold or a blocked nose to relieve congestion.

Pregnancy:

The inner bark of the manuka branch was crushed and infused with hot water and commonly used to treat breast congestion.

Other complaints:

Infusions of inner bark could be taken by mouth as a sedative to promote sleep in people who are over excited, anxious or in pain . The boiled bark could also be rubbed into the skin to ease the pain of a fracture . The strength of manuka also made it useful as a splint for fractures.

Alternative uses:

Manuka was used for canoe decking, and making fishing poles and traps . It was also useful for creating weapons of war, with branches being shaped into clubs and spears .

Matai

Maori name: Matai
Common name: Black Pine
Botanical name: *Prumnopitys taxifolia*

Origin and general information:

Matai is a tall forest tree that can grow to a height of 130feet. In its juvenile form the tree has copper leaves attached to the ends of wilting branches. When matured the tree has a black trunk, large flaky bark and leaves that are green/blue on the upper side and pale green on the underside. It is often used for milling and flooring in houses due to its fine texture and aesthetically pleasing brownish yellow colour.

Rongoa:

Wounds and bruising:

Matai was used in decoctions prepared for surgical procedures involving fractures and other related external ailments. This was due to the astringent properties that comes from the tannins found within the wood. The matai has been used as an antiseptic for wounds.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The bark of the matai was boiled with hot stones and taken for stomach pain. The trunk was tapped and the juice taken by mouth as a disinfectant in the treatment of consumption.

Other Rongoa uses:

The matai was consumed for the swelling of the lymphatic glands.

Miro

Maori name: Miro
Common name: Brown pine
Botanical name: *Prumnopitys ferruginea*

Origin and general information:

The miro tree is found throughout New Zealand and is particularly prevalent in forest areas, growing to a height of around 25 metres,. Miro consists of small dark oval shaped leaves arranged in branch sets in two rows, with red juicy berries.

Rongoa:

Respiratory complaints:

Oil was squeezed from the red miro berries and taken by mouth to treat fever. Miro gum was also warmed and inhaled for relief of bronchitis and sore throats.

Genitourinary complaints:

The leaves and bark of the miro tree were boiled and the infusion taken by mouth to treat gonorrhoea.

Wounds and bruises:

Gum obtained from the bark has antiseptic properties and was used to heal ulcers and stop bleeding,.

Dermatological complaints:

Gum from the miro tree was used as a treatment for eczema and was particularly useful as it stuck to the skin.

Alternative Uses:

The juicy red miro berries could be eaten in times when food was scarce, and the oil from these berries was also used as a perfume or an insecticide.

Papapa

Maori Name: Papapa
Common names: Tuming, Snowberry
Botanical name: *Gaultheria antipoda*

Origin and general information:

Papapa is a shrub that grows to a height of one metre and has white, bell shaped flowers. It is found throughout New Zealand .

Rongoa:

Wounds and bruising:

The leaves of the papapa plant can be applied directly to wounds as a poultice.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The white flowers of the papapa shrub were eaten by the Maori to treat bouts of diarrhoea.

Other rongoa uses:

Leaves of the papapa plant were boiled in water and the infusion taken by mouth to increase the milk supply of nursing mothers.

Parakipere

Maori name: Parakipere
Common names: Blackberry, bramble
Botanical name: *Rubus fruticosus*

Origin and general information:

Parakipere is a shrub with spiny thorns that can grow to a height of three metres. It produces edible black fruit and can be found throughout New Zealand as it grows in poor soils and on most terrain.

Rongoa:

Genitourinary complaints:

The leaves of the parakipere were boiled and the infusion given by mouth to treat dysmenorrhoea. Infusions of parakipere leaves have been used as a diuretic.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The leaves of the parakipere contain a high tannin content which gives it astringent properties useful in the treatment of diarrhoea.

Respiratory complaints:

Parakipere leaves were boiled in water and the infusion given by mouth to treat coughs and fever.

Alternative Uses:

The parakipere fruit can boiled and made into blackberry jam.

Paretao

Maori name: Paretao
Common name: Shining spleenwort
Botanical name: *Asplenuim obtusatum*

Origin and general information:

The Maori viewed paretoa as an important plant with great spiritual significance and were careful never to burn it. Also, if the plant's fern was broken before a battle it was considered a bad omen and the encounter was likely to be called off.

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

The root used for cutaneous eruptions. The inner fleshy root of the plant was also used to help alleviate pain from burns and also had some healing properties. Fern used in vapour baths.

Patete

Maori name: Patete
Common name: Seven Finger
Botanical name: *Schefflera digitata*

Origin and general information:

Patete is a common shrub that can be found in woodland areas of New Zealand.

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

Sap from the patate plant was used to help heal sores caused by, or resembling scrofula. It was also useful for treating coldsores. The bark of the west side of the tree and the sap were mixed together with water to create a lotion to treat these skin complaints. The lotion was used to treat athletes foot .

Other rongoa uses:

Patate leaves were boiled and the extract given by mouth as a slimming agent. Patate root is used as a teething remedy for young children. It is rubbed onto the gums of the teething child until blood appears in the child's mouth.

Alternative Uses:

Patate has a number of non-medicinal uses including using the wood as a base to rub sticks for fire-starting and using the leaf as a bird whistle. The berries could also be crushed giving a purple dye and writing ink.

Piupiu

Maori name: Piupiu
Common names: Gully Fern, Feather Fern
Botanical name: *Pnematopteris pennigera*

Origin and general information:

This plant is found throughout New Zealand, predominantly in damp and lightly shaded areas.

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

Maori from Whangarei scraped roots and made them into a poultice for the treatment of boils.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

Piupiu leaves were boiled in water with a number of other leaves (ngaio, kapuka, mamaku and kawakawa) and the resulting concoction was taken by mouth to relieve sore stomachs.

Alternative Uses:

Piupiu fronds were used to wrap weka and other birds when being cooked in a steam oven.

Pohutakawa

Maori name: Pohutukawa
Common names: Pohutakawa, “Christmas tree”
Botanical name: *Metrosideros excelsa*

Origin and general information:

Pohutukawa is found in costal regions of the North Island. It grows to a height of around fifteen metres and has a round canopy of glossy green leaves. Pohutakawa produces striking crimson flowers in the month of December.

Rongoa:

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The bark of the pohutukawa tree can be boiled to extract the ellagic acid and given by mouth to treat the symptoms of dysentery and diarrhoea.

Wounds and bruising:

The juice of the inner bark is used externally to relieve inflammation and promote healing of wounds.

Other rongoa uses:

The crimson flowers contain sweet nectar that can be taken to relieve sore throats. The juice of the inner bark was also given to children to treat oral thrush .

Alternative Uses:

The bark of the pohutukawa tree contains essential oils that can be used in aromatherapy and as a pefume.

Ponga

Maori name: Ponga
Common name: New Zealand silver fern
Botanical name: *Cyathea dealbata*

Origin and general information:

Ponga is found throughout New Zealand, primarily in forest areas. It is also known as mamuku and korau in the north . Ponga is used for night travel through the bush, where the fern's frond would be inverted to mark a path .

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

The pith (pulpy heart of the trunk) was used as a poultice to treat running or seeping wounds and boils . The antiseptic properties of the plant made it suitable for this use. Young fronds were also used to treat boils. The fronds were boiled and the extracted juice applied to the boil, acting to draw out the infection.

Pregnancy:

Young fronds were also heated and used as a poultice for a mother's inflamed breast . Ponga fronds were also boiled and the extracted liquid given by mouth to expel the placenta after birth.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

Gum from the ponga tree was given by mouth to expel worms from the gastrointestinal tract .

Alternative Uses:

Before harakeke (flax) was woven ponga was put down on the floors of the sleeping house . This was done silver side down to prevent spores from blowing around after the seeds had dried .

The woody fibre found on the trunk of the ponga tree is also poisonous **.** This lead to its use in weapons, particularly heads of slings sticks called kitaha . These were shot using flax cord and a sling and once they pierced and enemy body they would snap, making it impossible to remove .

Pukatea

Maori name: Pukatea
Botanical name: *Laurelia novae-zelandiae*

Origin and general information:

The pukatea is found in wet gullies and swampy areas in the forests throughout the North Island and the north of the South Island. It has a preference for shady, wet area. It is one of the tallest trees found in New Zealand. The Maori people only used the bark of the pukatea for rongoa.

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

The outer bark was removed and the inner bark was steeped in hot water. The resulting extracted liquid was used to heal sores and ulcers.

Genitourinary complaints:

To treat venereal infection a decoction of the bark was made with water and hot stones in a drinking vessel, and it was then taken by mouth.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The inner most layer of the bark was crushed, shred and left to lie in cold water. The mixture was then given by mouth.

Other rongoa uses:

A strong decoction of the pulped inner bark was held in the mouth to treat pain associated with toothache. To treat neuralgia, fresh bark was steeped in hot water and the pulp was placed over the area of pain.

Alternative Uses:

The elaborate figureheads of the Maori canoes are often carved from the buttresses of the pukatea trunks, but the totara is still the preferred wood for the canoe’s hull.

Chemistry:

The bark of the pukatea contains the alkaloid pukateine, which has strong analgesic properties similar to those of morphine, but has no after effects.

Puriri

Maori name: Puriri
Common name: New Zealand Oak
Botanical name: *Vitex Lucens*

Origin and general information:

The puriri tree is a classic Northland tree that grows mostly in the top half of the North Island in coastal areas and lowland forest. The puriri tree can reach a height of 20 metres and produces berries that opossums and pigeons find delicious.

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

Puriri leaves were boiled in water and the resulting infusion applied to ulcers, especially those under the ear.

Respiratory complaints:

An infusion of puriri leaves in water was given by mouth to treat sore throats. The antiseptic quality of puriri leaves has resulted in a germicide based on the plant being patented.

Musculoskeletal complaints:

An infusion of puriri leaves in water can also be used to treat musculoskeletal problems such as muscle pain, backache and sprains.

Alternative uses:

The puriri tree has useful hardwood that was used to make spades, bridges, paddles, weapons, fences and other items that required sturdiness. Bark from the tree has been used to create dyes that are yellow/brown in colour.

Chemistry:

The most significant chemical isolated from the Puriri tree is the flavanoid vitexin, or C Glycoside. Beta-carotene and p-hydroxybenzoic acid are found in the leaves, and a methyl ester of p-hydroxybenzoic acid has been patented as a germicide.

Rahurahu

Maori name: Rahurahu
Common name: Bracken
Botanical name: *Pteridium esculentum*

Origin and general information:

Rahurahu is a cosmopolitan fern found throughout New Zealand. The roots are thin and coarse and are dug up during August and September. Only those roots that were at least 18 inches below the ground were harvested.

Rongoa:

Spiritual healing:

A cure for headache was to have the Maori priest beat together stalks of rahurahu over the patient's head whilst singing a chant. The fern was also used as an indicator of the patients' health. The priest would pluck a piece of fern from the ground and if the root appeared clean with little dirt, the patient was likely to recover. If the root appeared covered with dirt, evil was predicted. Rahurahu was also used as a spiritually cleansing plant. To cleanse a person a fern stalk was attached to the person and the priest would repeat incantations over them before they were thrown in a river. The individual would then free themselves from the fern while the fern floated away carrying the individual's sins with it.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The tender shoot and root were eaten or chewed to treat dysentery.

Genitourinary complaints:

Koromiko, ngaio, mahoe, and rahurahu root were combined and given by mouth to facilitate blood flow during menstruation or alternatively to cause abortion.

Respiratory complaints:

During the influenza epidemic in 1918-1919 a fern root concoction prepared by the Maori was reported to be effective.

Blood purifier:

The root was cooked in the embers of a fire then the skin was removed and eaten to treat disorders of the blood.

Wounds and bruising:

The fronds were burned and the ashes and charcoal dust applied to the affected area to treat severe burns. The bark of the fern root was also made into a lotion to treat minor wounds.

Other rongoa uses:

Rahurahu fronds were bruised until moisture was obtained and then rubbed on the affected area as a treatment for insect bites. Another interesting use involved mixing rahurahu roots with the juice of the tutu berry to use as a treatment for sea-sickness.

Chemistry:

Bracken has been shown to contain prunasin, which is a cyanogenic glycoside, shikimic acid and thiaminase. The carcinogenic and mutagenic properties of bracken have been attributed to shikimic acid but bracken may also contain a stronger carcinogen that can induce acute bracken poisoning syndrome. Thiaminase is an enzyme that breaks down thiamine causing vitamin B deficiency.

Alternative Uses:

The young shoots of bracken were regularly eaten by Maori. Bracken has been shown to have carcinogenic properties and the method of preparation by Maori only decreased the degree of carcinogenic activity. The consumption of bracken was suspected as a factor that accounted for the short life expectancy of Maori.

Rata

Maori name: Rata
Common name: Northern Rata
Botanical name: *Metrosideros robusta*

Origin and general information:

The rata is found throughout the North and South Islands of New Zealand . It begins life as a vine and grows up another tree until eventually it smothers the light of the other tree, killing it. By this time the vines have grown thick and formed a trunk which is able to support the tree . The rata can grow up to a height of feet and have a trunk of 18 – 20 feet in diameter . The leaves closely resemble those of the pohutukawa.

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

Rata bark was seeped in water to make a lotion which was applied to the affected area to treat ringworm. A poultice was also made from the bark and this was applied to the affected area to treat boils, sores and abscesses .

Genitourinary complaints:

The bark lotion used to treat ringworm was taken orally and also applied topically to treat venereal diseases such as gonorrhoea .

Musculoskeletal complaints:

Rata bark was beaten into a poultice and left in water. The patient could then use this lotion as a bath or massage it into the skin to treat sore muscles, rheumatic joints or broken bones .

Wounds and bruising:

The shoots were cut and the sap applied to a wound to stop the bleeding before it was covered with a leaf bandage . The bark could also be boiled and the remaining liquid applied to the bleeding area .

Respiratory complaints:

Nectar from the flowers was taken to treat sore throats.

Other rongoa uses:

To treat toothache, rata leaves were chewed and applied to a hollow in the tooth . The sap from the young shoots was also taken orally. It was said to have antiseptic and anaesthetic properties .

Rengarenga

Maori name: Rengarenga
Common name: New Zealand rock lily
Botanical name: *Arthropodium cirratum*

Origin and general information:

Rengarenga grows on coastal rocks and is found throughout the North Island and northern parts of the South Island of New Zealand. It has broad flat leaves that resemble harakeke (flax) leaves and produces small off-white flowers.

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

The base of the rengarenga leaves were made into a poultice and applied to ulcers. Rengarenga roots were also used for other skin complaints such as abscesses and tumours. The roots were scraped, roasted, beaten to a pulp and then applied to the affected area.

Alternative Uses:

Rengarenga roots were roasted or cooked in a steam earth oven and eaten by the Maori.

Rimu

Maori name: Rimu
Common name: Red pine
Botanical name: *Dacrydium cupressinum*

Origin and general information:

Rimu grows abundantly throughout New Zealand. The bark of the Rimu tree was the most valuable medicinally to the Maori.

Rongoa:

Wounds and bruises:

The hard and scaled outer layer of the bark was scratched off, and the remaining bark was pounded with stones and water. This could then be applied to ulcers, bruises or burns . The red gum that seeps from the trunk is especially astringent and was applied open wounds to stop bleeding and prevent infection .

Gastroinestinal complaints:

The red gum obtained from the rimu trunk was also very valuable internally. It was used for any bleeding of the lungs, stomach or intestinal tract and also to treat stomach aches. The gum was prepared by mixing a small portion of gum (about the size of a walnut) into a pint of water. A teaspoon of this was then given by mouth every four hours.

Alternative Uses:

Rimu was commonly used by the Maori to make weapons of war particularly long spears that were sometimes up to 20 feet long . The bark was also placed on fires to scare the evil spirits away with its particular smell.

St Johns Wort

Maori name: None found
Common name: St John's Wort
Botanical name: *Hypericum perforatum*

Origin and general information:

St John's wort is an introduced weed that is found throughout New Zealand, and is poisonous to both sheep and cattle. It is commonly taken today in many different preparations as a treatment for depression.

Rongoa:

There is very little documented about Maori use of St John's Wort, however early European settlers made a proprietary ointment of raulwolfia, R. serpentine and St John's wort and used it to treat wounds and ulcers. It was also used as an expectorant for treating coughs and a tea made from leaves and flowers was used as a diuretic to treat fluid retention.

Taramoa

Maori name: Taramoa
Common name: Bush Lawyer
Botanical name: *Rubus cissoids*

Origin and general information:

Taramoa is a vine that is found in bushy areas throughout New Zealand. The origin of the common name comes from its ability to cling onto anyone that brushes up against it. The maori name taramoa translates to “a heap of prickles” and refers to the thousands of backwards pointing spikes that the plants uses to grow upwards against the side of the trees. The plant has unfavourable handling properties and can often prick skin. Despite all this, it was valuable for rongoa, especially for women.

Rongoa:

Respiratory complaints:

An infusion of the leaves was drunk to help alleviate congestion of the chest and could also suppress coughs and sore throats.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The young leaves were chewed and swallowed for internal stomach pain. The bark was boiled and the liquid taken by mouth to help ease pain associated with constipation. Taramoa roots were also mashed and boiled in water before being taken by mouth to treat intestinal parasites.

Pregnancy:

Maori women who had recently given birth bathed in taramoa leaves along with the leaves of mangeao and kotukutuku. The root of the taramoa was also used in a decoction that was drunk to expel the placenta. The leaves were used to heat stones that were in turn used to alleviate pain associated with childbirth.

Dermatological complaints:

The roots of taramoa were cooked with tea and whiskey and added to hot water. The liquid was bathed in for the treatment of boils, abcesses and septic infections.

Genitourinary complaints:

The vine of the taramoa, along with harakeke (flax) root and karamu were boiled and taken by mouth for the treatment of urinary and menstruation flow difficulties.

Tawapou

Maori name: Tawapou
Common name: Orewa
Botanical name: *Planchonella costata*

Origin and general information:

The tawapou tree grows up to a height of 20 metres and is found in coastal regions from Opotiki to the North Cape of New Zealand. It has a large; glossy green leaves with bright red berries and banana shaped seeds.

Rongoa:

Wounds and bruising:

The red berries of the tawapou tree were boiled for three hours to extract an oily residue which was then given by mouth to relieve pain associated with bruising and strains. The same oil can rubbed into the affected area to relieve itching.

Alternative uses:

The brown, banana shaped seeds were made into necklaces which were worn by unmarried Maori women.

Tikumu

Maori name: Tikumu
Common names: Cotton plant, Shepherd's daisy
Botanical names: *Celmisia spectabilis/coriacea*

Origin and general information:

Tikumu is a member of the large daisy family found in New Zealand. The name Tikumu refers to a number of species particularly Celmisia spectabilis and Celmisia coriacea. They tend to grow in the subalpine areas especially in and amongst the upland grasslands of the southern ranges. They bear white flowers and bloom in spring. The tikumu plant has long leaves that bear a similar shape to flax.

Rongoa:

Respiratory complaints:

Early European settlers of New Zealand smoked the leaves of Tikumu and found it useful for people who suffered from asthma. It was also used as a tobacco substitute.

Wounds and bruising:

Early medical practitioners in Otago used the leaves as fine cotton lint for dressing wounds.

Dermatological complaints:

The sap from the plant was used to treat abscesses in the mouth.

Titoki

Maori name: Titoki
Common name: New Zealand Ash
Botanical name: *Alectryon excelsus*

Origin and general information:

Titoki grows throughout the North Island (particularly in Northland) and the northern parts of the South Island of New Zealand . It is usually found growing low on forest slopes or in river valleys and can grow to a height of 30 - 40 feet . The leaves grow in bunches, are often toothed and grow to about inches in length .

Another easily recognisable feature is that the branches, twigs and flower branches are all covered in rusty hairs . The fruit grow in bunches of 3 – 4 and usually have a brown capsule which when it splits containing a black shiny seed and scarlet red pulpy berry . These berries are poisonous and usually cannot be eaten, but the maori discovered that this was useful in “blood spitting” in a tuberculitis infection.

Rongoa:

General tonic:

Oil extracted from its seed was useful for a number of ailments. This green oil can be used to rub into sore breasts, put into the ear for ear ache, eyes for sore tired eyes or rubbed onto healing wounds, bruises, sprains or rheumatic disorders.

Dermatological complaints:

Titoki leaves were used as an insect replant. The leaves were boiled and the extracted liquid was then rubbed onto the skin . If bitten by an insect the juice from a bruised leaf could also be used to reduce the pain and swelling of the bite.

Toetoe

Maori name: Toetoe
Common name: Toitoi grass
Botanical name: *Cortaderia toetoe*

Origin and general information:

The toetoe is the largest native grass in New Zealand and is found throughout the country in swampy areas and coastlines.

Rongoa:

Wounds and bruising:

The feathery top of the toetoe was used as a poultice to exclude air act as a haemostatic agent to stop bleeding.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The lower parts of the young shoots of toetoe were eaten to stop diarroea.

Genitourinary complaints:

The young shoots of toetoe were chewed to relieve symptoms of kidney and bladder complaints. To treat intestinal parasites, the roots of, toetoe, tataramoa and pirita were mashed and added to hot water to make the liquid that was given by mouth.

Other rongoa uses:

To treat toothache, the stem of the toetoe (called Kakaho) was roasted on an open fire then chewed until pain was relieved. Juice obtained from the white stem of the toetoe was used to wash the tongues of babies infected with oral thrush.

Alternative uses:

The Maori used toetoe stems to line the walls and ceilings of their homes, and today people use the feathery plumes of the toetoe grass as decoration.

Totara

Maori name: Totara
Common name: Totara
Botanical names: *Podocarpus totara, Podocarpus hallii*

Origin and general information:

The totara species is found in the North and South Islands of New Zealand, and the hallii species is generally only found on Stewart Island. The totara species has harder wood, shorter leaves and sheds thicker slabs of bark. The totara is easily recognisable as it has large sheets of bark hanging off, a straight trunk and often grows to over 30 metres . Totara leaves grow on all sides out of the branch and are green with a bronze tinge .

Rongoa:

Dermatological complaints:

When totara bark was burnt it was believed to cure venereal diseases, skin infections and piles. A piece of bark would have a hole drilled in it and then it would be placed into a fire. The patient would then sit the affected body part over the piece of smoking bark. The patient wore a cloak so the smoke did not escape too quickly .

Fever:

The main internal use was to treat fever. Totara and manuka leaves were combined and infused in water for a week. The infusion would then be taken by mouth.

Splints and bandaging:

Since totara bark was reasonably hardy, the Maori used it with flax to splint up sprains or broken limbs .

Other rongoa uses:

An infusion of totara leaves was used to promote hair growth and would be rubbed onto the bald head .

Alternative Uses:

The Maori had many uses for this tree however its wood was possibly the most useful. Totara wood is light in weight and easy to carve therefore could be easily fashioned into canoes or elaborate wall carvings.

Towai

Maori name: Towai or Tawhero

Genus: *Weinmannia racemosa, Weinmannia silvicola*

Origin and general information:

Weinmannia racemosa and Weinmannia silvicola are two closely related small trees found in lowland and monane forests. It is found almost everywhere throughout Northland, New Zealand.

Ronga:

Wounds and bruising:

The rough outside bark was scraped off then the inner bark was crushed and put into a bowl with some water then boiled for 30 minutes. The liquid was then strained and the cut bathe in the liquid.

Dermatological complaints:

A preparation made from scraped and boiled Towai was applied three times to cure sores. The bark from side of the tree facing the sun was taken, and the outer bark removed. The clean inner bark was broken up and placed in boiling water. The decoction, sometimes mixed with olive oil was applied to burns. This treatment was reported to minimise scarring.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The Towai bark from the east side of the tree was taken and boiled in water for two hours. Two wine glasses of this decoction was swallowed to act as a purgative.

Other rongoa uses:

Towai bark was soaked in water and given by mouth to treat oral thrush in babies.

Tutu

Maori names: Tutu
Common name: Toot
Botanical name: *Coriaria arborea*

Origin and general information:

The Tutu is a small tree that grows to a height of 8 metres and can be found throughout New Zealand up to 1,000 metres above sea level.

Rongoa:

Wounds and bruising:

Young shoots were made into a poultice or the leaves were boiled and then applied to the affected area to treat inflammation due to bruising or broken limbs.

Gastrointestinal complaints:

The tutu plant has been taken in small amounts to relieve dysentery.

Alternative uses:

Young Maori without tattoos used tutu berries to imitate the tattoos of older men.Tutu berries were also used to make a popular tutu wine however care had to be taken when making this wine to ensure toxic berries were removed.