

FLAX - harakeke

Phormium tenax

400

The māori name for flax is harakeke. It is the main plant used for weaving kete (containers) and whariki (mats). Flax fibre (muka or whitau) is used to make traditional kakahu (cloaks). Today, harakeke is also used in non-traditional ways like creating pieces of art.

IMG 401



Growth form

Harakeke has a soft growth form, it is not woody like a tree. The sword-like leaves are arranged in pairs around the growing point (rito) to form a fan.

Flowers

Harakeke flowers from late October through to February. Each flower stalk (korari) grows up to five metres tall from the centre of the fan. Each korari has a group of little branches, that grow out from each side of the main stem. These grow bunches of red flowers.

Pollination

The flowers are designed to be pollinated by nectar-feeding native birds – tui, korimako (bellbirds) and pihipihi (waxeyes). The seed capsules on harakeke form in summer on the upright flower branches. Each pod contains dozens of black, glistening seeds. When the dry pods burst open, the seed is scattered, and can be carried by water and wind.



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