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Distribution of *Leptospermum*

Of the 86 species, 81 are endemic to Australia; 1 tropical species (*L. amboinense*) extends to South-east Asia; a species common in Tasmania (*L. scoparium*) is widespread in New Zealand; and 3 species are endemic to South-east Asia. These 3 species are *L. javanicum*, *L. parviflorum* and *L. recurvum*, the last being found only on Mt Kinabalu in North Borneo.

Ecology

The different species occupy a wide range of habitats, but most are associated with low-nutrient soils in areas where ample water is available. Many of the eastern coastal species occur in damp heaths, while others are found in rocky or sandy sites.

Leptospermum scoparium

Leptospermum scoparium (Manuka or Tea tree or just **Leptospermum**) is a [shrub](#) or small [tree](#) native to [New Zealand](#) and southeast [Australia](#). It is found throughout [New Zealand](#) but is particularly common on the drier east coasts of the [North Island](#) and the [South Island](#), and in Australia in [Tasmania](#), [Victoria](#) and [New South Wales](#). Manuka (from [Māori](#) 'mānuka') is the name used in New Zealand, and 'tea tree' is a common name in Australia and to a lesser extent also in New Zealand. This name arose because [Captain Cook](#) used the leaves to make a 'tea' drink.^[1] The common name "Tea Tree" is also shared with the related [Melaleuca](#) tree of Australia suggesting that both were used to make tea by Captain Cook.

It is a prolific scrub-type tree and is often one of the first species to regenerate on cleared land. It is typically a shrub growing to 2-5 m tall, but can grow into a moderately sized tree, up to 15 m or so in height. It is [evergreen](#), with dense branching and small [leaves](#) 7-20 mm long and 2-6 mm broad, with a short spine tip. The [flowers](#) are white, occasionally pink, 8-15 mm (rarely up to 25 mm) diameter, with five petals. This species is often confused with the closely related species [Kānuka](#) - the easiest way to tell the difference between the two species in the field is to feel their foliage - Manuka leaves are prickly while Kanuka leaves are soft.^[2] The wood is tough and hard, and was often used for tool handles. Manuka [sawdust](#) imparts a delicious flavour when used for [smoking meats](#) and [fish](#).

Medical and health benefits

Manuka products have high antibacterial potency and are widely available in New Zealand. Similar properties led the [Māori](#) to use parts of the plant as natural medicine.

[Kakariki](#) parakeets (*Cyanoramphus*) use the leaves and bark of Manuka and Kanuka to rid themselves of parasites. Apart from ingesting the material, they also chew it, mix it with [preen gland](#) oil and apply it to their feathers.^[3]

Manuka [honey](#), produced when [honeybees](#) gather the [nectar](#) from its flowers, is distinctively [flavoured](#), darker and richer in taste than [clover](#) honey and has strong [antibacterial](#) and [antifungal](#) properties. The finest quality Manuka honey with the most potent antimicrobial properties is produced from hives placed in wild, uncultivated areas with abundant growth of Manuka bushes.

Leptospermum scoparium



Leptospermum scoparium foliage and flowers

[Scientific classification](#)

Kingdom: [Plantae](#)
Division: [Magnoliophyta](#)
Class: [Magnoliopsida](#)
Order: [Myrtales](#)
Family: [Myrtaceae](#)
Genus: [Leptospermum](#)
Species: L. scoparium

[Binomial name](#)

Leptospermum scoparium
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