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Macropiper excelsum

[Synonyms : *Piper excelsum*]

PEPPER TREE is a shrub or tree. Native to New Zealand it has slender green catkins.

It is also known as Big pepper, *Kawakawa* (Maori), and Lofty pepper.

Warning – the leaves can be very poisonous if consumed in quantity (in the form of a drink for instance).

Excelsum means ‘tall or high’.

Locally the small sweet-tasting, yellow to orange fruit (the seeds are spat out) have been eaten, especially by Maori children – and these aromatic berries have offered a flavouring for a seaweed jelly.

The leaves have been used locally to make a tea and have also been fermented for a beer. They are a significant ingredient in the New Zealand liqueur known as Titoki which the Country exports today to Australia, Britain, Fiji and Japan.

The fruit are not the preserve of human beings only as they are also enjoyed by birds and rats.

Smoke from burning wet leaves and twigs offers an insecticide and insect repellent.

Medicinally, local herbalists have recommended a leaf decoction to ease toothache and rheumatic pains, leaf poultices have been applied to bruises, and the roots have been used as an aphrodisiac.