



Harakeke

(New Zealand Flax)

Phormium tenax

FACT SHEET

Harakeke is the most important weaving material for Māori. Its long, strong leaves can be made into everything from kete (baskets) to sails. Wharariki is another flax that's native to Aotearoa New Zealand. Harakeke can reach 3 metres tall, but wharariki grows to about 1.6 metres.

Māori use

Bad cuts were sewn up with muka (flax fibre). The leaf's hard part made a good splint for a broken bone.

Where they are found

Harakeke grows all over Aotearoa, but it especially likes wet areas. It grows wild in just one other place in the world: Norfolk Island, Australia.

5 Facts

- 1** Muka is the soft fibre of flax, used to make clothes.
- 2** Every kāinga (village) once had a pā harakeke (flax plantation) with different types of harakeke.
- 3** Only the outer leaves are cut for weaving. The new shoots are protected by inner leaves, like children protected by their parents.
- 4** Harakeke and wharariki look similar, but wharariki has twisting seed pods that hang down.
- 5** Flax was New Zealand's biggest export in the 1800s, and often used for making rope.

Did you know

Pūpū harakeke (flax snails) live under harakeke – but they don't eat it! They prefer dead leaves from trees.

How you can help

Plant harakeke in your garden – the nectar feeds tūī, korimako (bellbirds), tīeke (saddlebacks), pekapeka (short-tailed bats), geckos, and some insects.