

# FACT SHEET Native Plant Species of Norfolk Island

## Norfolk Island Hibiscus

*Lagunaria patersonia*

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Norfolk Island Hibiscus is from the *Malvaceae* family and is a native to the island.

### Common names

Oak, White Oak, Norfolk Island Hibiscus

### Description

The Hibiscus is a large, flowering tree that can reach heights up to 20m. Its bark varies from light brown to pale grey, and the timber is very light in colour.

The tree has dense foliage, with greyish-green ovate leaves around 10cm long. The underside of each leaf is pale in comparison to the upper side of the leaf. The leaves grow alternately along the stem.

In late spring and early summer, the tree produces pink-ish purple flowers in masses, with a typical 5-petaled hibiscus form. These flowers give way to grey-green seedpods 3-5cm in diameter, that mature and split open to reveal multiple red-brown, bean-shaped seeds.



Photo credit: Lilli-unna King

Hibiscus seedling



Hibiscus seedpod



Hibiscus flower



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## Distribution

This species is widespread across Norfolk Island. It can be found in many different environments from cliff faces and paddocks to forests and backyards.

## Growing conditions

The Hibiscus is a hardy tree that tolerates most conditions. However, young plants benefit from some protection against harsh sun and wind.

## Propagation

Seeds of the Hibiscus germinate easily at home. Mature seedpods can be collected, and the seeds be removed. **Extra care** must be taken when handling them, as they contain hundreds of fine fibreglass-like hairs that can stick in the skin and cause irritation. Wearing gloves is recommended.

Once collected, sow the seeds into a tray and cover with a light layer of compost. The seeds will germinate quickly.

## Other information

The Hibiscus is an extremely important tree for the ecosystems of Norfolk, particularly in coastal areas.

It is hardy against wind and salt, allowing it to grow in exposed areas, retain soil and provide shelter for other species. Hibiscus create dense leaf litter underneath them, providing good protection of the soil.

Although Hibiscus timber is quite soft and produces a lot of ash, it has played a role in the island's history. During the penal settlements, it was used to burn inside the limekiln alongside quarried calcarenite for producing lime, which was used for rendering buildings.



*Hibiscus leaf (upper)*



*Hibiscus leaf (lower)*