

# The Nikau - New Zealand's only native palm

Text and photos: David Medway



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NZ plant: Arecaceae family

The endemic Nikau palm (*Rhopalostylis sapida*) is the only New Zealand member of the mainly tropical and subtropical Arecaceae (palm) family. It is primarily a species of coastal to lowland forest in the warmer parts of New Zealand. The Nikau palm has the distinction of being the most southerly naturally growing palm in the world.

Nikau palms grow up to about 10 metres high, with a trunk of about 25 centimetres in diameter. They flower between November and April. Ripe and/or green fruits may be found on them during most months of the year. The ripe fruits are a favoured source of food for the endemic New Zealand Pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) in Pukekura Park and Brooklands, and elsewhere on the main islands of New Zealand. Those birds are efficient and important dispersers of Nikau seeds.

Many large Nikau palms are growing in Pukekura Park and Brooklands. Mature examples can be seen most easily in the fern grove between the Kiosk and Fred Parker Lawn. Several of the Nikau palms there have ripe fruits at present (March).



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*Pukekura Park Nikau photos:  
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