

Plants for Schools

Harakeke (*Phormium tenax*)

There are lots of different species and cultivars/varieties of Harakeke - flax in NZ, some are suitable for raranga/weaving while others are very attractive e.g. variegated, red, dwarf, etc but not so useful for weaving. Harakeke is a tāonga/treasure and should be treated as such.

When handling, planting, harvesting Harakeke and composting, there are tikanga and kawa - protocols and practices that should be observed. These will vary from iwi to iwi and seeking advice from manu whenua before you start is advised. In the 2008, 2019 editions of Fun with Flax, Mick Pendergrast has explained in more detail, the practices to follow when working with Harakeke, flax.

When you harvest/hauhake Harakeke, it is customary to offer a karakia to the plant(s). If the plant resists your harvesting, move on. This applies to all plant harvesting.

Harvesting should not happen when:

- it is raining,
- you are unwell,
- at night
- you are menstruating (mate wahine)
- harakeke is flowering

Other information

- best time for harvesting late summer/autumn
- harakeke/flax must not be burned or put in the rubbish
- karakia should be said before harvesting, prepping, weaving
- weaving, when left, should be covered and if you want to touch someone's weaving, it is protocol to ask first
- no eating or drinking while harvesting or weaving
- no stepping over flax whenu/leaves/strips
- tools used with harakeke should not be used for anything else

If you find a plant that has signs of fresh hauhake/harvesting, then it is probably being cared for by a kai raranga/weaver and it would be polite to leave it for them.

When harvesting you go to the outside of the fan shape and leave the Rito - baby, and Awhi Rito - parents. Harvesting is done with a sharp craft knife in a downwards and outwards movement at a 60 degree angle cutting from the top side closest to the Rito to the outside of the leaf. The whenu/leaves are gathered up and any scraps or offcuts taken away from the plant, to allow for lots of air movement at its base. Scraps, waste whenu are not burned but are composted, chopped up and used as mulch for other plants or can be fed to livestock. Livestock love harakeke, so if you have plants they need to be protected well from cattle.



After handling harakeke, hand washing is a **must** as it has a laxative effect.

Kai raranga/weavers look for different types of Harakeke plants for different purposes e.g. for weaving of baskets - kono, konae, the whenu are flexible and the plants best suited grow with the leaves flopping down. For muka based designs, the plants are very fibrous, the whenu grow straight up and the edges may be black. The photo on the right above shows this type of plant.

Please note that the knowledge shared here is not ours, but has been shared with us by other kai raranga, kuia and our kaiako Brenda Tuuta and Adrienne Spratt from Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and summarised from Pendergast, M 2008, 2019. (H Meikle, K Whittaker)

Useful References

Harakeke

- Pendergrast, M. (2008). Fun with flax: 50 projects for Beginners. Aldington Books Ltd.
- Pendergrast, M. (2019). Fun with flax: 50 projects for Beginners. Penguin Random House.
- <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/nights/audio/2018899925/past-and-future-us-e-of-harakeke>
- Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision - [Harakeke - practises, plus footage of very well well known kai raranga - weavers](#)
- Superb webpage with links to key things including how to plant a Pā Harakeke [Te Kohinga Harakeke o Aotearoa – National New Zealand Flax Collection](#)
- 4.3 harakeke – weaving people together - manaaki whenua. (n.d.). https://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/assets/Publications/Te-reo-o-te-repo/4_3_Flora_Harakeke.pdf
- Kahutoi Te Kanawa, 'Te raranga me te whatu', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/te-raranga-me-te-whatu/print> (accessed 7 August 2023)
- [social studies - ist403](#)
- [Reviews of books on NZ flax weaving](#)
- Flaxworx - lots of videos on all aspects of working with Harakeke <https://www.youtube.com/user/Flaxworx>

How to grow potatoes

- <https://www.palmers.co.nz/cdn/shop/files/12460-How-to-leaflet-Potatoes.pdf?v=2877164457034922111>



Seed saving/exchanges/planting native trees

- [Seed Libraries and Tool Libraries :: Environment Network Manawātū](#)
- [Planning and planting a native garden](#)

Connections to many organisations/learning resources

- [Environment Network Manawatu](#)
- [Teaching resources » Manaaki Whenua](#)
- <https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/topics> - suitable resources for all levels & PLD for teachers

RESOURCES | Paper4trees - FREE to join

Can supply classroom recycling bins and native plants

Have resources for teaching

Your school may already be a member, worth contacting them to ask

They would love photos of your taura planting the trees