



Matagouri / matakoura / wild Irishman

Native plants

Matagouri, or wild Irishman as it is sometimes called, is a thorny bush or small tree that can grow up to six metres high. It has very small leaves, small greenish-white flowers and characteristic spines that may be several centimetres long.

Matagouri is found only in New Zealand and it has no close relatives here, although related species are distributed throughout South America, south-east Australia, Tasmania and the Chatham Islands.

Where is it found?

Matagouri can be found from the mouth of the Waikato River south through Otago, but it is rare on the west coast of the South Island and uncommon in the North Island. It is frequently found in short tussock grasslands in the South Island and can also be found on sand dunes and river beds.

K. McKinley

Matagouri facts

- Like plants such as the legumes (peas and beans), matagouri has special micro-organisms on its roots that enable the plant to take nitrogen from the atmosphere and convert it into a form that can be used by the plant.
- This ability to 'fix nitrogen' means that matagouri



can live in relatively nutrient-poor habitats. They enrich the soil around them and thereby allow other plant species to regenerate.

- Matagouri is very slow-growing and some plants on undisturbed river terraces can be over 100 years old.
- Matagouri thorns were used by early Māori as tattooing needles when no other materials were available.
- Its flowers make very good honey.

Threats

Matagouri is one of a number of native trees and shrubs that are an early spring food preference for possums, when the sweet sap is rising in the plants and other food is in short supply. In some regions, possums have been found to completely ring-bark some trees.

Matagouri is frequently burned or poisoned in order to create and maintain pasture. In addition, matagouri faces stiff competition from weeds such as gorse and broom, which are also aggressive invaders of pasture and tussock grasslands.

Further information

For more information about matagouri, visit your local Department of Conservation office or visit the DOC website at www.doc.govt.nz.

Matagouri, Anne River, St James Walkway T. Lilleby

