

Gustav Kunze (1793 – 1851)

Gustav Kunze was born at Leipzig, Germany, on 10 April 1793. In 1813 he registered at the University of Leipzig, one of the oldest universities in Europe, founded in 1409. There he studied medicine, qualifying with a doctoral degree in 1819. Extending his interest in botany, he joined the Wernerian Natural History Society in Edinburgh in 1817, and in following years became a member of many botanical societies in Europe.



Kunzea ericoides

Kānuka (or mānuka, as it was mostly known until the 1930s) occurs in Australia and New Zealand. Recent research (2014) in New Zealand has identified at least ten species within the variable *Kunzea ericoides* complex and the myrtaceous tree collected by the French in 1827 has been redefined. *Kunzea ericoides* ('like an erica or heath') is a northern South Island endemic, common in Northwest Nelson and the main *Kunzea* north of the Wairau and Buller Rivers. It has flaky bark, often pendent branch ends, and without the use of 20x magnification, branchlets that appear hairless. The bright green leaves are needle-like but soft, and the small flowers, borne in clusters, are white with a red centre and relatively few stamens. Commonly known as kānuka, manuoa, titira or atitira, it could be endangered by further clearance for farmland or felling for firewood. Both mānuka and kānuka leaves make good herbal teas (hence 'tea tree'), and they are valuable sources for the production of honey and therapeutic oils.

He was appointed professor of medicine at the University of Leipzig in 1822. In 1835 he became associate professor of botany, and two years later he assumed directorship of the university's botanical garden. He was elevated to full professorship in 1845, and held the position until his death in Leipzig on 30 April 1851. The list of course topics covered during his tenure reflects the range of his interests and skills, and includes the natural history of cryptogamic plants, the internal construction and chemistry of plants, the application and pharmacological uses of plants, and a section on German mineral springs. Lectures were supported by demonstrations in the botanical garden, and excursions.

Kunze's research was focused on ferns, but he also described many orchids. He studied microscopic fungi and published, with J K Schmidt, *Mykologische Hefte* (Mycological Notebooks), two volumes (1817-1823). He was also one of five botanists who dealt with Krauss's South African cryptogam collection on the latter's return to Stuttgart in 1840.

In 1828 the German ornithologist, botanist and foremost orchidologist of the 19th century, Heinrich Gustav Reichenbach, named the plant genus *Kunzea* in honour of Gustav Kunze. Species ascribed to Kunze are appended with the author abbreviations Kunze or Kze, and include several ferns found in New Zealand. His collection is in the herbarium of the University of Leipzig Natural History Museum.

In 1832 French botanist Achilles Richard described *Leptospermum ericoides* from specimens collected by the French in the 1820s from the Astralobe Roadstead (Abel Tasman coast). In 1983 the species was transferred to *Kunzea* by Australian botanist, Joy Thompson.