



## POHUTUKAWA

Maori name:	Pohutukawa
Common name:	Pohutukawa (New Zealand Christmas Tree)
Botanical name:	<i>Metrosideros excelsa</i>

### What does it look like?

The magnificent pohutukawa is well known for its spreading shape and beautiful red flowers in December and January. The flowers appear to be composed only of stamens, giving them their distinctive brush-like look. Slow growing, pohutukawa eventually reach 15 - 20 metres in height. Short trunks to 2 metres in diameter often have thick, twisted roots looking more like branches helping it cling to coastal cliffs. Pohutukawa are very long lived, with leaves that are a dark greenish blue on top and white underneath. Whitish seed capsules follow the flowers and open around May to release multitudes of thin, brown seeds.

### Where does it grow?

Pohutukawa is abundant in coastal forest and along coastlines of warmer parts of the North Island north of Taranaki and Poverty Bay. It will grow in almost any well drained soil, but not waterlogged ones. Seedlings under two years old are very frost tender. Pohutukawa thrive near the sea, easily withstanding strong wind, salt spray and drought.

### Growing tips . . . in your plant growing unit

Scale insect may attack pohutukawa, causing "bubbling" of the leaves. Spray with an insecticide - either chemical or organic spray preparations are available. Because they are frost tender when young, they shouldn't be planted out for 2 years, so you will need to pot them into bigger containers (for example empty milk cartons) after a year.

### Planting out for soil conservation

Pohutukawa provide excellent shelter and erosion control in coastal areas. Unfortunately, possums love pohutukawa, eating mature leaves in winter and new young leaves in spring, eventually killing the tree. Possum control in replanted areas is a must. The Project Crimson Trust has been set up to save the pohutukawa.

### Used to . . .

Pohutukawa's scientific name, *Metrosideros*, is derived from the Greek words metro, meaning middle and sideros meaning iron, referring to the hardness of its dark red heart wood. It was traditionally used for paddles, weapons, digging sticks and spade blades. Early European bushmen made an infusion (tea) from the inner layers of the bark to cure dysentery and diarrhoea. The nectar was collected for food and to treat sore throats.

### Did you know . . . ?

The biggest pohutukawa in New Zealand is called Te Waha o Rerekohu. It grows at Te Araroa in the grounds of Te Waha o Rerekohu Area School, is 19.8 metres tall with its branches spreading over 38 metres and is reputed to be over 300 years old. Another pohutukawa at the tip of Cape Reinga is reputed to have been there for more than 800 years and is sacred to the Maori people as the departure point of the spirit from this world.



Picture from Lindsay Poole and Nancy Adams, 1990, *Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand*, DSIR Publishing.

Prepared by the Trees for Survival Trust, with the help of the Lotteries Grants Board Schools may copy this material and use it for educational purposes.