

Tree Profile: NZ Christmas Tree - *Metrosideros excelsa*

General: According to *Wikipedia* the *Metrosideros excelsa* is a coastal evergreen tree in the myrtle family, Myrtaceae, that produces a brilliant display of red (or occasionally orange, yellow or white) flowers made up of a mass of stamens. Pōhutukawa is one of twelve species endemic to New Zealand. Renowned for its vibrant colour and its ability to survive even perched on rocky, precarious cliffs, it has found an important place in New Zealand's culture for its strength and beauty and is regarded as a chiefly tree (rākau rangatira) by Māori. It provides a blaze of colour over Christmas.



The tree will grow to 25m in height with a spreading dome-like form. Their trunks and branches are sometimes festooned with matted fibrous aerial roots.

Metrosideros kermadecensis is endemic to the volcanic Kermadec Islands about 900 km north-east of New Zealand. It is very similar to, and often confused with, the pōhutukawa of the mainland, differing mainly by having smaller, more oval leaves, and by flowering throughout the year.

Metrosideros collina is a small compact rounded shrub growing to 1.5m tall, with clusters of orange/red flowers appearing sporadically throughout the year. Very similar in appearance to pōhutukawa. The 'Tahiti' cultivar is often seen in local nurseries.

Metrosideros is a common Bonsai in New Zealand with a very attractive bark and aerial roots, but tend to be hard to get to flower as bonsai!

Lighting & Temperature: Place in full sun to promote flowering, but just morning sun is o.k. too - protect from frost while young! New shoots in early spring on even older trees will easily frost burn and die, but this will not generally affect the overall health of the plant.

Watering: Daily if in full sun, but less in winter - they don't like having their roots wet for too long and prefer a well-draining soil.

Feeding: They need heavy feeding through spring and autumn! Best to use a slow or controlled release type fertilizer like Native Osmocote at the drip line. You can use liquid fertilizer like Charlie Carp throughout the seasons. Don't use fertilizers with high phosphate!

Repotting: Should be done after flowering at the warmest time of the year, using a well drained soil. Older trees every two to four years, some growers repot every year regardless of age.

Propagation: Easy from seeds in spring, semi ripe cuttings in autumn.

Pruning: Best time is after flowering, leave 4 leaves with buds in the axis when you prune - don't prune or pinch again until next year if you want flowers! You'll sacrifice the flowers if you like to shape - that's what I've done.

Lee Wilson is pruning his back quite hard in August and will get lots of new shoots which he lets grow, because they are the ones to get flowers on them and feeding heavily in that time!

They will bud from old wood, so a nice shape can usually be regained!

Wiring: On young branches only, the older wood on Pōhutukawa becomes very hard and difficult to shape with wire.

Pests and diseases: Scales and caterpillars - use a systemic insecticide sprayed regularly through summer.

Styles: Informal upright, single or multiple trunks, semi cascades, windswept and root over rock. Aerial roots may spontaneously appear from the trunk and/or lower branches, and may be encouraged by increasing humidity and perhaps shading the lower parts of the tree.



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