



Manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*)

Manuka is a member of the *Myrtaceae* (myrtle) family found throughout tropical and South America across to China and down through the Pacific. It is found throughout New Zealand from lowland to montane shrublands and forests, including infertile and poorly drained soils.

Manuka and Kanuka (*Kunzea ericoides*) are seen by many as very similar plants and are lumped together under the common name of Tea Tree. They each, however, belong to a different botanical genus and share few common features.

Throughout most of New Zealand manuka is seldom more than 7 metres high and with a stem diameter commonly less than 70mm. In the far south, including Stewart Island, manuka can be very large with stem diameters exceeding 500mm. Manuka has showy white flowers up to 12mm diameter, and evenly spread over the branches, often very abundant in early summer. The woody seed capsules, up to 6mm dia., will usually remain on the tree for more than a year. In northern New Zealand wild Manuka may have reddish flowers and it is this variety that has been cultivated to the Red Manuka available as a garden plant. The leaves are small, narrow and sharply pointed.

Captain Cook was the first person to brew tea from Manuka and said that it had a very agreeable, bitter taste when made with fresh leaves, but lost some of its piquancy when made with dry leaves (Kanuka leaves produce a less flavourful tea). The name "tea-tree" comes from the early European bushmen who used Manuka leaves to brew tea.

Manuka honey contains very high levels of the antibacterial compound methylglyoxal. Oils extracted from manuka leaves in some areas also have antibacterial and fungicidal properties.

The Māori and early settlers used to chew young shoots or swallow a drink made from seed capsules to cure dysentery and diarrhoea. The leaves, brewed in water, help urinary complaints and reduced fevers. The liquid from boiling the bark was used to treat constipation, as a sedative to promote sleep and reduce fever, for bathing sore eyes, treating colic, inflamed breasts, scalds and burns.

Manuka wood is tough, being used by Māori for implements such as fernroot beaters, mauls, paddles, weapons, weeders, digging sticks and bird spears. Kanuka and Manuka wood is commonly used as firewood, especially for barbeques, or charred into charcoal. Both Manuka and Kanuka have been used to make brush brooms.



The wood has a fine texture and cuts nicely to show dark brown to red-brown heartwood with a tight interesting grain that takes a good finish.

Possible health risks: none known
Density not known

