



POHUTUKAWA (*METROSIDEROS EXCELSA*)

Pohutukawa is found all over New Zealand, although it naturally grows only north of a line from New Plymouth to Gisborne. The Pohutukawa is known as New Zealand's Christmas tree as it has beautiful scarlet flowers during the Christmas/early summer season, becoming a national environmental symbol. Pohutukawa, Rata, Kanuka, and Manuka all belong to the myrtle family.

Pohutukawa will grow up to 20 metres high on sheer rock outcrops, and have massive spreading crowns up to 35 metres across. Trees are moulded by coastal winds and to coastal slopes, and spread their weight over unstable ground. Some trees are up to 1,000 years old, and according to Māori the souls of the dead leapt from an ancient Pohutukawa at Te Reinga (North Cape) on their way to the netherworld.



Pohutukawa cling tenaciously to a cliff.

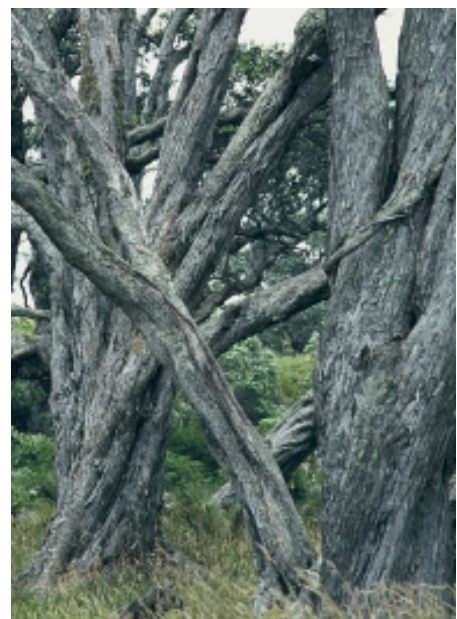
Photo, C Rudge, DOC.



Māori used the timber for beaters and small items requiring weight and hardness. It is extremely unusual to find a straight millable trunk, with most trees having multiple leaders spreading from close to ground level. The naturally curved shapes were used extensively by the early colonial sailors for ships' structural elbows and knees.

Pohutukawa wood is a rich deep red-brown, heavy, strong and durable. The wood invariably has a tortuous grain, and is very dense and hard to work. Colour ranges from soft pinks through to rich reds and tans with black streaks in older wood. Spalting (decay), bark inclusions, and compression stress produce attractive grain patterns, and, while challenging to the turner, the wood produces a great finish. Many excellent exhibition and artistic pieces are made from Pohutukawa.

Possible health risks: none known.
Density 950 kg/m³



Pohutukawa trunks and bark vary considerably at different growing locations. Photo: C Rudge, DOC.

