

## Metrosideros excelsa – New Zealand Christmas Tree / Pohutukawa

Seed is quite fine and therefore can be difficult to spread evenly when sowing. Mix the seed with about twice the seed quantity of fine river sand and sow evenly as if spreading a pinch of salt. Propagation is the same as for bottlebrush.

Sow in a mixture of a good friable potting mixture to an equal to one and a half parts of clean river sand in a propagation tray about  $\frac{2}{3}$  inches deep. The growing mixture should be damp but not drenched. Immerse the tray and mixture in a water bath and allow to drain for a few minutes, then proceed. Sow seed by compressing into mixture lightly using a piece of smooth wood then cover lightly with growing mixture to a depth of about  $\frac{1}{8}$  of an inch at most. Cover the tray with clear polythene during daylight hours. Water lightly daily with a watering can with a dispersed nozzle so as not to disturb the seeds too much.

Place the tray in a warm dappled light position. Germination should take place within 14 - 21 days depending on temperature.

Once the shoots appear allow them to reach about one to one and a half inches then replot into a similar medium in individual small growing containers and allow to grow until about 10 - 12cm. Keep the seedlings in a warm dappled light position protected from slugs and snails.

### Planting out

Like many Australian natives *Metrosideros* does not appreciate its roots being disturbed so it is a good idea to pick a container when transplanting the first time that you can cut the bottom out of and then simply plant out the tree in the container in your chosen spot. It would be best to plant out in Spring early summer once the danger of frost has passed as it is frost sensitive, particularly when small. Apply a small amount of low phosphate fertiliser at planting time but not too much.

Pick a site in full sun where there is good drainage. Soil type is not really a problem as long as it is not waterlogged and preferably not clayey. If your soil is heavy, try mixing in a quantity of sand to lighten it and make it drain better. Try not to create a sump around the tree where water will collect and give the young plant protection from frost where possible, it becomes hardier as it is established.

Water the plant in well and then water lightly daily in the first few weeks and thereafter as needed – probably every few days in mid-Summer.

The plant likes some root protection and extremes of ground temperature can cause it problems, particularly when young. Use a mulch around the trunk to do this – about 5cm extending out from the plant about 80cm all round.

