

Sophora species

Sophora tetraptera

Sophora tomentosa

This is a lovely New Zealand native that is a fast growing medium sized tree or shrub that will reach its maximum height of 7.5 – 10m in about 8 years. It is usually evergreen but may go briefly deciduous before the flush of new growth in the spring. In mid spring it is ablaze with 5cm long flowers which hang in clusters along its branches. Normally grows with a single trunk, in youth it tends to be V shaped, but will develop a rounded crown with maturity. It may also be shaped to form a multi-trunked shrub. The Kowhai is a good choice for curbside planting, while its open shade allows gardening underneath its canopy.

The very tiny leaflets and intricate branching of this plant suggest that it would make a nice bonsai.

The Kowhai prefers good drainage and average water. It occurred naturally only on the north island but is now grown extensively throughout New Zealand and is hardy to about -10°C. Found along streams, forest margins and lowland on North Island in New Zealand, from East Cape.

Plants should be container-grown and planted out whilst young as older plants do not transplant well.

Propagation

This species is easily propagated from seed which requires pre-treatment by soaking overnight in hot water.

Seed – best sown as soon as it is ripe in a greenhouse. Pre-soak stored seed for 12 hours in hot (not boiling) water and sow February in a greenhouse. Prick out the seedlings as soon as they are large enough to handle into individual pots and grow them on for 2 years under protected conditions in colder areas

Plant them out into their permanent positions in early summer of their third year.