

Metrosideros kermadecensis

COMMON NAME

Kermadec pōhutukawa

SYNONYMS

Metrosideros polymorpha Hook.f. and *Metrosideros villosa* Kirk are heterotypic synonyms of *M. polymorpha* Gaudich., *Metrosideros villosa* Sm.

FAMILY

Myrtaceae

AUTHORITY

Metrosideros kermadecensis W.R.B.Oliv.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

METKER

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 22

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: DP, IE, OL

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, OL

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE, OL

2004 | Range Restricted

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Tree bearing leathery elliptical leaves that are white underneath and bearing scattered red bristly flowers inhabiting the Kermadec Islands (and planted in New Zealand). Leaves 2-5cm long, widest at the middle. Flowers composed from many red filaments around a green glossy disk that is fuzzy white underneath.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Kermadec Islands: Raoul, North and South Meyer Islands, Herald Islets (Napier, Nugent and Dayrell)

HABITAT

The dominant canopy tree on Raoul Island where it is found from the coastline to the highest peaks. Forms the main tree of both dry and wet forest types. It was supposedly also present on Macauley Island although there are no herbarium specimens known to substantiate this claim.



Raoul Island. Photographer: Bec Stanley, Licence: CC BY-SA.



Metrosideros kermadecensis. Photographer: Gillian M. Crowcroft, Licence: All rights reserved.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Multitrunked (rarely single) tree up to 20 m tall usually with a broadly spreading, domed canopy; trunk up to 3 m diameter, if more than one usually much smaller; trunk surface often covered in adventitious roots. Bark mostly firm, tessellated to platy, grey, grey-brown or whitish, often covered in sparse to dense growths of lichens, liverworts and mosses. Branches erect to spreading, sometimes scrambling across forest floor in which case often rooting freely where touching the ground. Branchlets terete, numerous toward branch ends. Young branchlets, leaf undersides, inflorescence-axes, hypanthia, and sepals densely clad in tomentum, tomentum initially white, maturing dirty grey. Petioles 5-7 mm long, terete to subterete, very coriaceous; lamina 20-50 × 10-30 mm, dull dark green above with appressed, greyish indumentum along the midrib, sometimes extending along the upper surface of the base of the leaf, orbicular, suborbicular, broadly ovate- to elliptic-oblong, apex obtuse to retuse, base obtuse to cuneately-narrowed, coriaceous, margins weakly to strongly recurved. Inflorescence complex, comprising 2 or more terminal compound corymbiform cymes each bearing numerous flowers; pedicels rigidly stout, 8-12 mm long. Hypanthium obconic to turbinate, sepals coriaceous to subcoriaceous, deltoid to triangular, gland-tipped; petals caducous, fleshy, scarlet, crimson to pink, 2.2-3.2 × 2.0-3.0, orbicular, suborbicular to oblong, glabrescent. Stamens numerous, filaments crimson, 10-23 mm long; anthers versatile, yellow, 1.0 × 0.2-0.4 mm. Nectarial disc initially green at anthesis, maturing red or red-green. Ovary 3-locular, adnate to hypanthium; capsules long-persistent, woody, 3-valved, 6.0-7.2 mm long, receptacle distinctly exerted, outer surface and inner sepals and hypanthial rim covered in appressed white to greyish-white tomentum. Seeds numerous, 2.5-4.5 mm long, yellow to pale orange, very narrowly elliptic to linear, 2-4-angled, body often twisted, laterally compressed, apex curved or hooked.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to the Myrtaceae of New Zealand

SIMILAR TAXA

Metrosideros kermadecensis is the only species of that genus found on the Kermadec Islands so in the wild it is not likely to be confused with any other plant. In New Zealand it is commonly cultivated and sometimes sold as pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*). From that species it differs by its smaller (20-50 × 10-30 mm cf. 25-100 × 25-35 mm in *M. excelsa*), orbicular, suborbicular, broadly ovate- to elliptic-oblong (rather than elliptic to oblong, broadly-lanceolate, acute or obtuse) leaves. However, populations of *M. excelsa* on the Three Kings Islands approach *M. kermadecensis* in having smaller more consistently elliptic-oblong leaves. In cultivation *Metrosideros kermadecensis* seems to have no set flowering period with flowers seen throughout the year.

FLOWERING

Throughout the year

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink

FRUITING

Throughout the year

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed. Cuttings can be grown from water shoots. Hybridises with pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*). Although cold sensitive it can be grown in most places provided there is adequate shelter. This species frequently has some flowers present throughout the year but it rarely has a major flowering event.

THREATS

Metrosideros kermadecensis is the dominant tree on Raoul Island and it is also prominent on the nearby Meyer Islands and Napier, Dayrell and Nugent in the Herald Islets. Prior to the arrival of myrtle rust (*Austropuccinia psidii*) in New Zealand, *M. kermadecensis* was assessed as At Risk – Naturally Uncommon because it is an island endemic which globally occupies a small area. Myrtle rust is an invasive fungus that threatens native myrtle species, so in 2017 the status of *M. kermadecensis* was reassessed as Threatened – Nationally Critical. Learn more at myrtlerust.org.nz.

ETYMOLOGY

metrosideros: Iron heart

kermadecensis: From the Kermadec Islands

WHERE TO BUY

Commonly sold in most garden centres in New Zealand, often - unfortunately - mislabelled as *Metrosideros excelsa*.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (8 June 2009). Description adapted from Allan (1961) supplemented with data obtained from herbarium specimens, fresh material and observations made on Raoul Island.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allan, H.H. 1961: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. I, Government Printer, Wellington

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Metrosideros kermadecensis* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/metrosideros-kermadecensis/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/metrosideros-kermadecensis/>