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## New Zealand Christmas Tree

*Metrosideros excelsa*

### It doesn't always have to be the poinsettia plant

**Worth Knowing:** In its natural habitat the evergreen *Metrosideros excelsa* blooms around New Year and serves therefore as christmas tree, while on the northern hemisphere cultivated plants rather show their dense bunches of red brush-like flowers in the time between May and August. The blossoms form a lovely contrast to the velvety soft silver-grey leaves. The New Zealand Christmas Tree, also known by the Maori as Pohutukawa - Ironwood Tree, can easily be cultivated as a tub plant and takes very well to cutting.

**Natural Location:** The tree is found primarily in the coastal areas of the northern islands of New Zealand, either as a solitary plant or as a whole forest population.

**Cultivation:** Seed propagation indoors is possible throughout the year. When you sow the seeds too close to each other, you often get a couple of weak seedlings. Therefore, it is better to initially mix the fine seeds with a little bit of sieved dry sand before sowing. Spread the seed-mix on moist potting compost, put just a little compost earth on top and cover the seed container with clear film to prevent the earth from drying out. Don't forget to make some holes in the clear film and take it every second or third day completely off for about 2 hours. That way you avoid mold formation on your potting compost. Place the seed container somewhere bright and warm with a temperature between 20°C and 25°C and keep the earth moist, but not wet. The germination usually takes about four to eight weeks.

**Place:** For the tree to develop a rich blossoming, it is best when kept in a full sunny and warm place. You are also welcome to keep it during the summer outdoors in a preferably wind-protected spot near a heat-preserving wall.

**Care:** Planted in good quality earth for tub plants richly mixed with expanded clay, the Pohutukawa most likely grows nicely. Keep it consistently moist and avoid waterlogging. From April to October you may also give fluid fertilizer for tub plants every two weeks. The long sprouts can be pruned back without any problem in late winter.

**During the winter:** To cultivate a *Metrosideros* that brings out a rich blossoming next year, you should keep it in a bright and cool spot with temperatures between 5° and 12° Celsius during the winter, so it will have all its strength in coming spring to develop a lot of flowers. The tree might tolerate a minimum temperature of 0° Celsius for a short time, but better don't take any risk.