

Friday, March 1, 2024

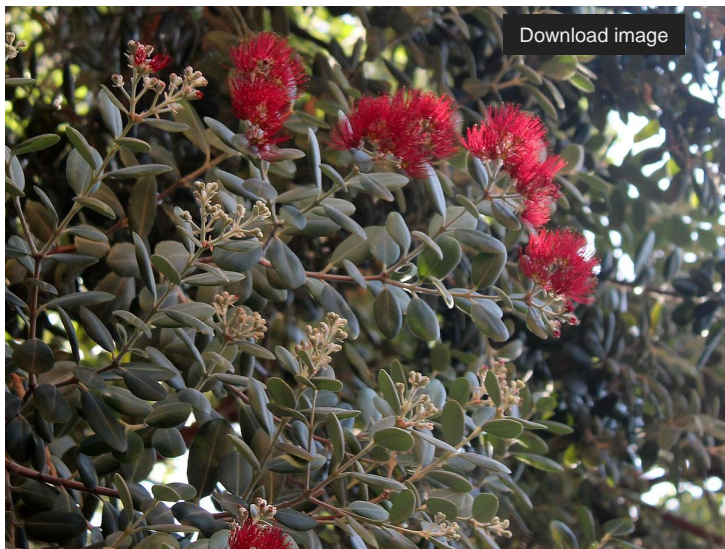
Metrosideros excelsa

Scientific name: *Metrosideros excelsa* Sol. ex Gaertn.

Family: *Myrtaceae*

Common name: New Zealand Christmas Tree, Pohutukawa Tree

This June, we are featuring an evergreen tree with a very dense, branched, and dark crown. Its trunk is short, and the bark sheds thick scales, giving it a deeply furrowed appearance. Some mature specimens develop a series of hanging, fibrous aerial roots. The leaves are oblong, with entire margins, leathery, dark olive green on the upper surface and whitish-downy on the underside, no more than 10 cm long. The flowers are small, but grouped in inflorescences they are very showy due to the intense red color of their stamens.



The scientific name of the genus comes from the Greek *metra*, meaning center or heart; and *sideros*, referring to iron, due to the hardness of its wood; a reference also found in one of its common names, the ironwood tree. It blooms in spring; but it is also known as the Christmas tree because, being native to New Zealand, which is in the southern hemisphere, it blooms there between November and January.

In its native habitat, it is believed to have medicinal properties. It is grown as an ornamental plant and is widely used in urban areas as a trimmed hedge; however, if left to grow naturally, it can reach a height of 20 meters, hence the species name: *excelsa*. Pohutukawa is very hardy, withstanding strong winds and proximity to the sea. There are several specimens in La Concepción: next to the vineyard collection, near the gardener's cottage, and another, already quite large, near the cypress house.