

Metrosideros umbellata

COMMON NAME

southern rātā

SYNONYMS

Melaleuca lucida G.Forst., *Metrosideros lucida* (G.Forst.) A.Rich.

FAMILY

Myrtaceae

AUTHORITY

Metrosideros umbellata Cav.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

NVS CODE

METUMB

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 22

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP, De

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Tall forest tree bearing pairs of oval leathery leaves with a and masses of red bristly flowers in summer inhabiting much of the South Island and some upland North Island sites. Twigs rounded in cross section. Leaves 2.5–6 cm long by 1–2 cm wide, gradually narrowing to sharp tip and short stalk.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (locally present from Te Paki south to Mt Pirongia, the northern Kaimai Ranges (Ngatamahinerua) and Mt Manuoha (Te Urewera)), South Island (from Rangitoto ki te Tonga / D'Urville Island south to Fiordland, with a mainly westerly distribution—absent from Marlborough, most of Canterbury and northern Otago), Stewart Island/Rakiura (common) and Auckland Islands (common).

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

UPL: Obligate Upland

Rarely is a hydrophyte, almost always in uplands (non-wetlands).

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to the Myrtaceae of New Zealand](#)



Close up of *Metrosideros umbellata* flowers. Photographer: Department of Conservation, Licence: Public domain.



Metrosideros umbellata flowers. Photographer: Department of Conservation, Licence: Public domain.

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed but inclined to be rather slow-growing unless planted in ideal conditions. In cultivation this species prefers a moist soil. Can be grown from soft-wood and semi-hardwood cuttings but these can be very difficult to strike. A beautiful specimen tree which should be more widely planted in locations where conditions are suitable.

THREATS

Threat status elevated in 2017 due to the risk of Myrtle rust. Rather uncommon in the North Island, and at some sites it is locally threatened by possum browse.

Myrtle Rust (*Austropuccinia psidii*) is an invasive fungus which threatens native myrtle species - learn more myrtlerust.org.nz

ETYMOLOGY

metrosideros: Iron heart

umbellata: Bearing flowers in umbels

TAXONOMIC NOTES

North Island plants are genetically (based on nrDNA ITS sequences) distinct from South Island plants but the differences cannot be matched to morphology. All recent southern rata collections made from the Tararua Ranges are the hybrid *M. robusta* × *M. umbellata* (Gardner et al. 2004). A few photographs taken in the 1930s from the Francis Ridge, Southern Tararua Ranges may have been genuine *M. umbellata* but the species cannot be found there now. Other northern Tararua records of *M. umbellata* appear to be based on *M. robusta*.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Beddie AD. 1953. Root behaviour in *Metrosideros*. *Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin* 26: 2–6.

de Lange PJ. 1994. Southern rata *Metrosideros umbellata* confirmed from Mt Pirongia Western Waikato. *Auckland Botanical Society Journal* 49: 57–59.

Druce AP. 1959. Southern rata in the Tararuas. *Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin* 31: 12–15.

Gardner RC, de Lange PJ, Bowala T, Brown HA, Keeling J, Wright SD. 2004. A Quaternary phylogeography for New Zealand inferred from chloroplast DNA haplotypes in *Metrosideros* (Myrtaceae). *Biological Journal of the Linnean Society* 83: 399–412. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1095-8312.2004.00398.x>.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

MORE INFORMATION

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