

Plant of the Month, August 2016

Metrosideros collina

Metrosideros is a genus of approximately 60 trees, shrubs and vines mostly found in the Pacific region. *Metrosideros* is one of the most widely spread flowering plant genera in the Pacific. Most of the tree forms are small. However, some New Zealand species are exceptionally large, in particular *Metrosideros excelsa* New Zealand Christmas bush or Pohutukawa growing to 20m and *Metrosideros robusta* Northern Rata growing to 30m. It has always been a mystery to Southern Hemisphere botanists that, despite the clear propensity towards long distance dispersal, this genus does not occur in Australia. Some members of the genus *Angophora* (which includes the common street tree *A. Costata* Smooth-barked Apple) were once included in *Metrosideros*. In general *Metrosideros* has red flowers while *Angophora* has white.

Form: Grey green foliage; bushy when young but becoming umbrella shape when mature. Medium size.

Leaves: In contrast to the Summer flowering New Zealand Christmas Bush, it has wavy edges to its leaves and its orangey red flowers appear in Spring,.

Features: Hardy small to medium size tree. Lives 20+ years

Uses: Dense screening tree. Very coastal tolerant and can be pruned as a hedge.

Naming

The Gardens' label previously gave these details: *Metrosideros* 'Thomasii' Spring Fire Christmas Bush, Origin Hawaii, and nurseries give it a multiplicity of names and origins. The Gardens' label now shows it as *Metrosideros collina*. The diversity of names prompted Murray Dawson of New Zealand Landcare Research to study this plant, of which three 70 year-old examples grow in the Waitangi Treaty Ground 200 km north of Auckland.

He found that it matches a variety *Metrosideros collina* var. *villosa* found in cloud forest above 480m on Rarotonga in the Cook Islands.

Initial genetic analysis of varieties of *M. collina* show that one is very similar to *M. excelsa* while others are related to the species *M. collina*. More work needs to be done on these species.



Family: Myrtaceae

Genus: *Metrosideros*

Species: *Metrosideros collina*

var. *villosa*

Common names:

Springfire Christmas Bush

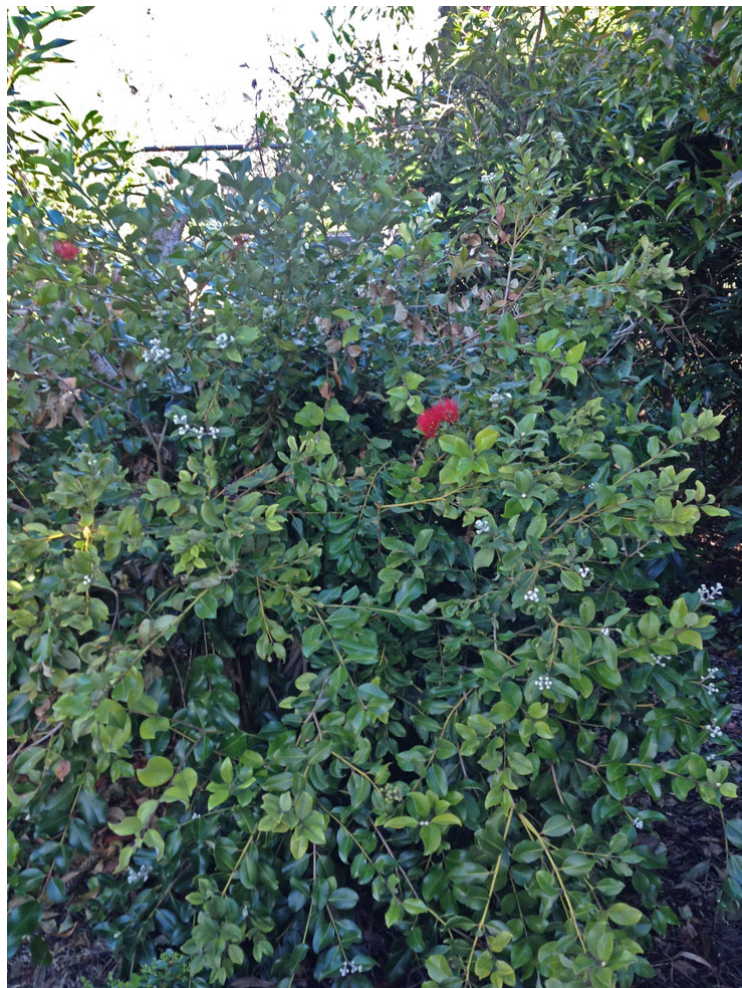
Origin: Cloud forests above 480 m in Rarotonga

Location in GBG: In the 21st Century Garden in the island flora area (opposite the inland Australian bed).

Time of flowering: Brilliant crimson flowers in spring and sporadically throughout the year.

Meanings of its name:

The name derives from the Ancient Greek *Metra* or "heartwood" and *sideron* or "iron"



References

1. Wikipedia article on *Metrosideros* Wikipedia.org
2. *The origin of Metrosideros 'Spring Fire'?* Journal of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture www.rnzih.org.nz/RNZIH_Journal/Pages_4-7_from_2011_Vol14_No2.pdf

Geelong Botanic Gardens Map

