



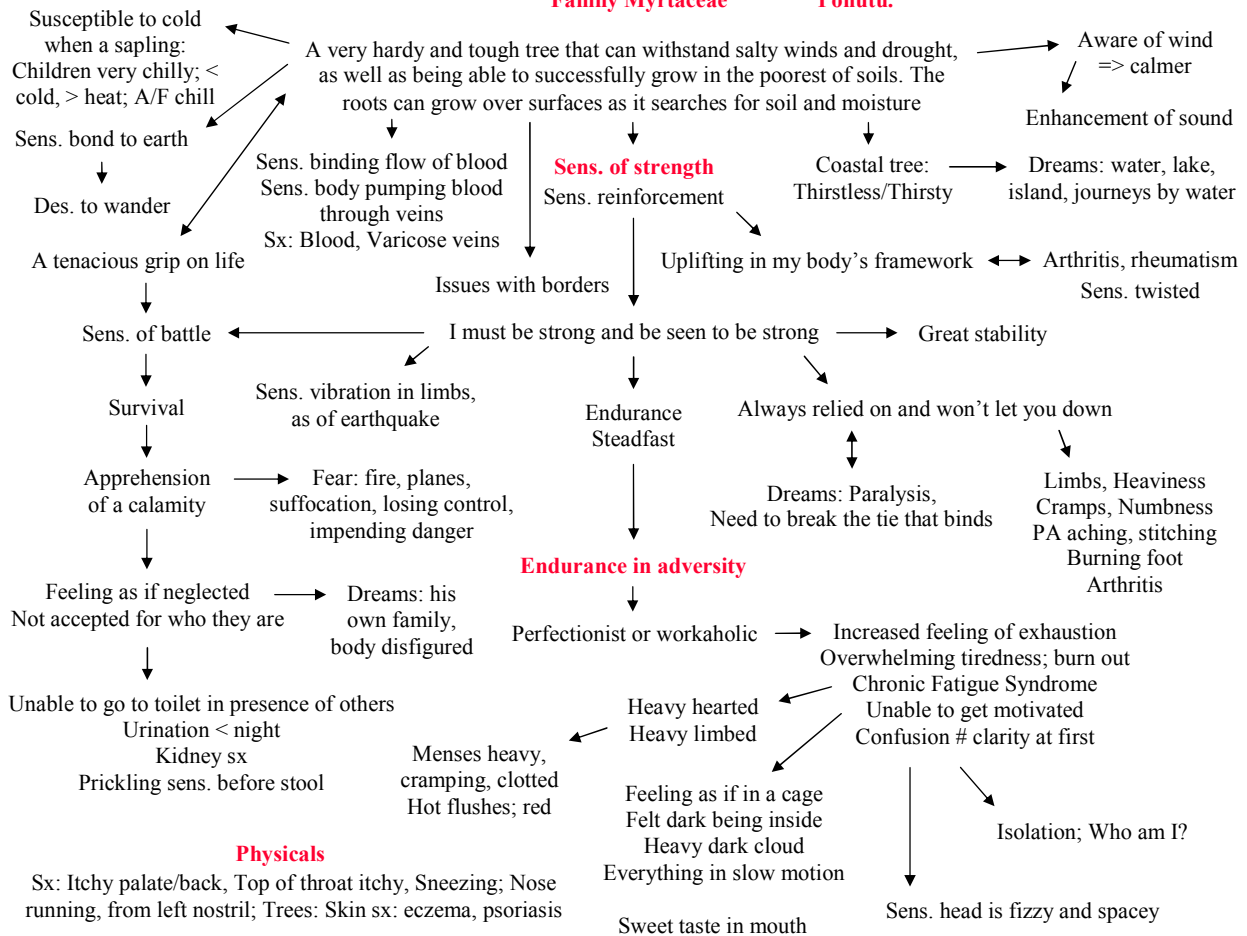
# POHUTUKAWA

Pronounced: Po-who-too-cow-a

Pohutukawa is said to come from the Maori word 'hutukawa' refers to a headdress with red feathers  
**Metrosideros excelsa**; Greek: metra = 'heartwood' and sideros = iron; excelsa = 'tall, lofty, outstanding', or from the Latin 'to raise', 'exalt'; **Metrosideros tomentosa**: tomentosa: Latin 'like felt' or 'soft woolly covering'

Family **Myrtaceae**

**Pohutu.**



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(1) Dept of Conservation, New Zealand, Project Crimson Trust;  
 (2) Medicines of the Maori by Christina MacDonald, William Collins (NZ) Ltd, Auckland, 1974; (3) Peter H. Buck, The Coming of the Maori (1950), Maori Purposes Fund Board  
 (4) [http://yomi.mobi/egate/Metrosideros\\_excelsa/](http://yomi.mobi/egate/Metrosideros_excelsa/)  
 Photo top: Aaron Clarke; [www.flickr.com/photos/98316616@N00/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/98316616@N00/)  
 Photo bottom: Cape Reinga/Muriwhenua © Ian Hay

Maori collected its nectar using it for food and to treat sore throats. An infusion of the inner bark was used for diarrhoea and as a remedy for dysentery. The tannin in the inner bark was used to stop bleeding. They bound it against the wound or made a poultice of the boiled and powdered bark and bandaged it over the wound. For toothache a piece of inner bark was held in the mouth, or they steeped it in water and used it as a mouthwash and gargle (2)

Del. everything red, d.d. Silene capensis:  
 Del. objects are red (also a revered plant)

Bridge between earth, sky [& underworld]



The etymology of the name is uncertain but some similar names in Polynesian are: 'futu' the Polynesian name for Barringtonia asiatica, which has flowers very similar to those of the Pohutukawa; and kawaRi, which refers to a root with special psychoactive and/or ritual properties.(4) The tree is one of the most beloved New Zealand native trees. It lives for up to 1000 years and grows up to 25 metres, often on cliffs overhanging the sea with the branches nearly reaching the water, occasionally found with shellfish living in the hanging mass of roots. *Metrosideros* have a unique ability to form roots from the branches so as the trunks and branches twist, arch and wind around each other the thick roots spread and cling to the cliff-face sending down roots into the earth and rocks they touch – even into bare lava. They flower from November to late January and are often absolutely covered with stunningly beautiful red blossoms (Del. everything red); hence it is known locally as: 'the New Zealand Christmas Tree'. The flowers are often used to decorate homes at Christmas. Called: 'Tall ironwood'; the wood was favoured by early European boat builders, because the natural bends were ideal for making boats, and the timber was immune to seaworms. Legends tell of the young warrior Tawhaki and his attempt to enlist help in heaven to avenge his father's death. When he fell back to earth his blood became the crimson flowers of the pohutukawa. At the northernmost point of New Zealand is a point of land where the Tasman Sea meets the Pacific Ocean, on this rock spit is a single small Pohutukawa tree which has been clinging bravely to the rock for 800 years. The Maori believe that after death the soul flies north to this tree and slides down the roots to enter the 'path to Reinga' (the underworld). It is a very sacred tree in New Zealand revered equally by Maori and non-Maori peoples and there is a very powerful aura of consecrated ground around Cape Reinga and even when there are lots of tourists it is easily felt.(1)