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*Metrosideros*

*Myrtaceae*

*Metrosideros* is derived from Greek *metra* (centre, core, heart-wood) and *sideros* (iron) components with reference to the hard wood.

Although many trees in this genus will start life in more conventional fashion some are not as benign. The minute seeds are very light and often get wafted into tree canopies. (This would seem to apply particularly to New Zealand flame tree, *Metrosideros robusta*.) Here they germinate like a Florida strangler fig (*Ficus aurea*) and the roots spread out and drop down around the host's supporting trunk. As these roots multiply and increase in size they exclude air and light. But not content with suffocation they ultimately crush and squeeze the trunk too so that the host dies from this as well – and the 'cuckoo' tree is left thriving and unsupported in its host's place. (There is said to be only one tree in New Zealand that can withstand this crushing onslaught and that is *Vitex lucens* (a close chaste tree, *Vitex agnus-castus*, relative) – which is held to be the Country's toughest and strongest native wood.)