

Red Flowering Trees

THE three lovely red flowered trees, two eucalyptus species and pohutukawa, described in this article by F. E. Wilkin, Plant Quarantine Officer, Department of Agriculture, Wellington, are all easily grown in most coastal districts in the North Island and in districts not subject to heavy frosts in the South Island. These trees are not very particular as to soil; indeed the lovely New Zealand pohutukawa grows naturally on rock-bound northern coasts with a minimum of soil and provides welcome shelter from the fairly strong, salt-laden winds in such localities. The section on flower garden work for January is by M. Joanna Lockie, Horticultural Instructor, Department of Agriculture, Auckland.

SHELTER, however, is fairly important for the red flowered *Eucalyptus leucocylon* var. *rosea* and the crimson flowering gum *Eucalyptus ficifolia*. As these plants will grow into fairly large trees, they are especially suitable for large gardens and landscape effects. All belong to the myrtle family, which has a large section with brilliant flowers like powder puffs. A number of species possess red or yellow styles and stamens.

Pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa* syn. *M. tomentosa*) is the magnificent blood-red flowered Christmas tree of New Zealand which when in full bloom is for sheer brilliance of colour unsurpassed by any other tree in the world. Many trees of this species in their natural habitat are literally covered with a 1½ in. pile of crimson styles and stamens which hides every leaf in the profusion of glorious flowers.

On northern coasts where the pohutukawa is most at home individual trees can be found in full bloom from October until March or April. This suggests that by selection the range of New Zealand's flowering trees could be extended. The majority of pohutukawa trees, however, bloom about Christmas time. A tree may flower for about 2 weeks, but it is at its best for about 3 days, when it will be found to be swarming with bees, and tuis and other birds are attracted by its abundant nectar.

Many different shades of red are to be seen among pohutukawas. Some trees have flowers of the most brilliant crimson imaginable and others have flowers of a brick red shade; for this reason care should be exercised in the selection of trees for cuttings or seed.

Another attractive feature of the pohutukawa is the flower buds, which have a covering of dense, matted, fine, woolly, silvery hairs. The undersides of the leaves and twigs often have a similar covering, which contrasts well with the dark green upper surface of the foliage.

In a favourable situation a pohutukawa may reach a height of 70ft. and have an immense spread of branches, especially when overhanging water in a sunny situation. Mature trees are slow growing, however, and would probably take 100 to 200 years to reach the above dimensions.

The wood is pink, heavy, and dense. Seasoned wood from coastal trees is hard enough to make gaps in a sharp axe. The boughs are much sought after for boat knees because of the bends and twists in them; as firewood it gives out a very fierce heat.

When young the trees grow about a foot a year in favourable situations, and flower at about 8 years from planting. A sunny, well-drained posi-

tion is best for growth and sturdy development.

Soft tip cuttings taken from mature trees and raised under glass will be found more resistant to frost when planted out than are seedlings with their delicate juvenile foliage. The juvenile foliage is chiefly distinguished from the mature foliage in being paler and softer in texture and not having fine matted hairs on the underside.

Young seedlings are subject to attack by psyllids, scale or aphid-like native insects which cause an embossed appearance of the leaves. Examination will show the psyllids in the pits on the undersides of the leaves. They can be controlled with a spray of nicotine sulphate, 1:600 plus soft soap; for small quantities the formula is as follows: Nicotine sulphate 6 teaspoons, soft soap 2oz., and water 4 gallons. As soon as the plants acquire their mature foliage they will no longer be attacked by psyllids, and they will also be found to be quite hardy.

Varieties of Pohutukawa

A yellow flowered variety of pohutukawa and a very attractive variegated variety are both obtainable from nurserymen. The variegated pohutukawa has smaller leaves and is slower growing than the ordinary pohutukawa.

The Kermadec pohutukawa *Metrosideros kermadecensis* syn. *M. villosa* from Sunday Island in the Kermadec group is also obtainable. This tree is similar in habit and appearance, but the leaves, flowers, and twigs, however, are all about half the dimensions of the New Zealand pohutukawa. Some specimens of the Kermadec pohutukawa bloom almost throughout the year, but only on odd twigs and branches. A profusion of crimson blossom at one time is not so common in this species as it is in the New Zealand pohutukawa. However, it makes a very good dense windbreak in coastal areas.

Eucalyptus leucocylon var. *rosea*

Eucalyptus leucocylon var. *rosea* is sometimes called ironbark, but it is really a white-wood. It is often sold in New Zealand as *Eucalyptus campbelli*. It is a delightful tree with long, pendulous, sickle-shaped leaves and smooth, silvery grey bark which is shed in long, paper-like strips. Most

Right—Foliage and flowers of red flowering trees. Upper—Pohutukawa. Douglas Elliott photo. Lower—*Eucalyptus ficifolia*. National Publicity photo.

