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**The Kowhai New Zealand's National Flower**

**By Alan Jolliffe**

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If there is one flowering plant that New Zealanders call their National Flower it is the Kowhai. It grows naturally throughout the dryer areas of New Zealand and because it is so popular it is planted in almost every garden.

There are however 2 main species of Kowhai. *Sophora tetraptera*, North Island Kowhai and *Sophora microphylla*, South Island Kowhai. Where these plant grow side by side in the wild natural hybrids also exist. Many hybrids have occurred in gardens as well. Additionally there are 2 naturally occurring varieties of *S. microphylla* and numerous forms, some of which have been named.

The North Island Kowhai, *Sophora tetraptera* is the easiest to grow and fastest to flower when grown from seed. It is probably the most commonly available in the Nursery industry.

As a garden plant the North Island Kowhai is excellent. With its fast upright growth it is ready to flower in 3–5 years. It does not go through all the twiggy juvenile stages of other Kowhais. It is easy to grow and will succeed in almost all garden situations. It will reach a height of 4–6m with a trunk diameter of 30–60cm.

In the wild *S. tetraptera* grows naturally along forest margins, in lowlands and hill country and alongside streams. Its natural altitude range is from sea level to 450 metres.

Often described as an evergreen tree it losses all its leaves for a very short period each year. In spring all the old leaves drop off as the new leaf buds break and develop into new branchlets. All the old leaves are replaced to provide a fresh green look. The leaves are divided along the mid rib into a number of leaflets. Each leaflet is oval shaped 25–30mm long and 5–7mm wide. It creates a feathery look. The new young branchlets and young foliage covered with dense silky hairs which are smooth to touch.

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The most distinctive feature is its flower. Each spring the large bright yellow flowers appear in pendulous clusters of 5–7 on naked branches. These showy clusters appear in great profusion. Individual flowers are up to 6cm long and the colour is a golden sulphur yellow. The calyx, which holds the petals in place, is a yellowish/green colour that adds further colour to the flowers.

Tuis and bellbirds love these flowers and visit them to drink the sweet nectar. Unfortunately these birds, in their haste, tear the flowers to pieces.

Following flowering seed pods are produced. These 4 winged pods house a single seed in specially constructed compartments. Each pod may have up to 8 seeds. When mature the seeds may be gathered and sown quickly to ensure they germinate.

Pests and diseases include the Kowhai moth whose larvae eat the leaves and the seeds. Scale insects may invade the Kowhai and they are easily controlled by spraying with all seasons spraying oil.

The Kowhai is the best known NZ Native flowering tree and one of the most beautiful. As a small tree it is excellent in many small gardens where light foliage cover is required and a burst of colour in spring when it smothers itself with blooms.

The botanical/Latin name has the following meanings. Sophora is an Arabian name for a tree with pea shaped flowers and tetraptera means 4 winged seed. Previously it was included in the genus Edwardia. Kowhai is the Maori name and means yellow.

Maori also recognised the Kowhai as an important plant. Its medicinal properties were explored by the Maori and poultices were made from bark and applied to wounds and tumours. An infusion of barks (a tea) from the Kowhai and manuka was used to treat internal pain, bruises and broken limbs. Wood ash from the Kowhai was used to treat ringworm.

The Maori are said to have regulated the planting of potatoes by the flowering time of the Kowhai.

The wood of the Kowhai is valuable as it is very durable. Logs have been used straight from the bush and used in construction without any special treatment.

As an individual tree the Kowhai is a superb garden plant. It is small enough for even the smallest of gardens but it is large enough to make an impact. As a garden tree there is none better in spring.

In the larger landscape the Kowhai makes a big success. Mass plantings of Kowhai make a tremendous impact on the scenery. This can best be seen in some of the naturally occurring stands in the Rangitiki area of the North Island.

Plantings of the Kowhai should be encouraged throughout NZ and in other places around the world to ensure this icon of New Zealand plants is able to show us its best each spring.

Alan Jolliffe is a garden writer and lecturer. I am available to write special articles for you about

Gardening and about New Zealand. I am a professional horticulturist, recreation manager, tourism advisor, teacher and local government manager. Contact [jolliffe@slingshot.co.nz](mailto:jolliffe@slingshot.co.nz)

## **Are You Sabotaging Your Site's Visibility?**

**By Kalena Jordan**

### **Are You Sabotaging Your Site's Visibility? by Kalena Jordan**

A recent study of New Zealand's Top 100 Companies by us here at Web Rank Ltd has revealed that every single one of New Zealand's leading companies have web sites that sabotage their ability to be found by Internet users.

How did this happen? The study reveals that each site belonging to the Top 100 contains design elements that in some way negatively impact their compatibility with and visibility in search engines. As a result, many of New Zealand's leading companies are not found listed in the search results of the most popular U.S. and New Zealand search engines, impacting their potential online revenue.

Most Internet users rely on search engines to find product and service providers. Unless they know the exact website address or search by the company or brand name, they will try to find what they are looking for by using keywords that describe a product or service's features, benefits or attributes. By ignoring the most important method used by people browsing the Internet, these companies are sacrificing an enormous opportunity to attract more traffic to their sites.

Websites are often a very large expense for these companies, ranging from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands of dollars. To invest such a massive amount of time, money and effort into an online presence and not ensuring it can be found is like constructing a storefront without any doors. After all, what is the point of paying so much money for a web site that will never be found?

Does your web site contain any of the same self-defeating elements? Let's take a look:

~ 25 percent of the Top 100 New Zealand Companies could not be found for their chosen search terms in either U.S. or New Zealand search engines. Are you targeting the most appropriate search terms for your site?

~ 62 percent of the Top 100 New Zealand Companies fail to utilise their site TITLE tags effectively. Are you including keywords in your web page TITLE tags instead of just your company name?

~ 13 percent of New Zealand's Top 100 Companies are using techniques that could get them penalised on search engines for "spamming". Are you avoiding techniques considered as "spam" by the search engines?

~ The majority (59 percent) of New Zealand's Top 100 Companies use little or no body text on their home page. Are you using plenty of text on your pages for search engines to index?

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~ 42 percent of the web sites belonging to New Zealand's Top 100 Companies are inaccessible to the visually impaired. Are you using ALT IMG attributes for your graphics and image files?

~ 5 percent of the Top 100 New Zealand Companies are not listed in any of the most popular U.S. or New Zealand search engines examined. Have you submitted your site to the major international and

local search engines and directories?

~ 63 percent of New Zealand's Top 100 Companies do not include a META Description Tag on their home page and 70 percent of the Top 100 New Zealand Companies do not include a META Keywords Tag on their home page. Have you included relevant META Tags in your site's HTML code?

~ 78 percent of the Top 100 New Zealand Companies do not use target search terms within their home page text. Do you?

Addressing all these elements will ensure your web site has the best chance possible of being visible in search engines and easily found by your target audience.

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