

Kōwhai

Sophora species

FACT SHEET



When kōwhai blooms, spring has arrived. In Māori, spring showers are called “te ua kōwhai” – “kōwhai rains”. Some can grow to be rākau (trees) 25 metres tall. One bushy species (Sophora prostrata) grows to be just 2 metres tall.

Māori use

The bark was softened, then put on wounds or aching backs.

Where they are found

Kōwhai live all around New Zealand, from cliffsides to ngahere (forests).

4 Facts

- 1 The bright-yellow kōwhai is our unofficial national flower. We've put it in paintings, and on stamps and coins. Birds love them too!
- 2 The kōwhai is the only native plant that kōwhai moth caterpillars feed on.
- 3 There are seven kōwhai species.
- 4 One species (Sophora molloyi) lives only on Cook Strait islands and Wellington's south coast.

Did you know

Nectar from the flowers is important kai for tūī, korimako (bellbirds), and kererū. They eat the leaves too!

Threats

Kōwhai numbers have gone down in some places cleared for farmland.

How you can help

Try growing a kōwhai from seed. You'll need to scratch the seed coat for it to grow.