

Native New Zealand Plants: where and when to see New Zealand's native plants flowering

This guide focuses specifically on New Zealand's native plants and seasonal flowering displays. Other natural phenomena in New Zealand, including wildlife, birdlife, and astronomical events, are covered in separate guides.



Photo: Mānuka flowering at Cape Reinga walkway. Credit: DOC

Native New Zealand plants: at a glance

- **Phenomenon:** Native New Zealand plants and seasonal flowering displays, many of which are endemic and found nowhere else on Earth.
- **Best months:** September – February (spring through early summer)
- **Best locations:** Coastal Northland and Auckland, forests nationwide, Fiordland and the West Coast, alpine regions such as Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park.

- **Why New Zealand:** Around 80% of New Zealand’s native plants are endemic, shaped by millions of years of isolation and diverse climates, creating distinctive and highly seasonal floral displays

Why New Zealand’s native plants are unique

From coastal cliffs to forested hillsides, New Zealand bursts into colour from spring through summer, offering visitors the chance to experience native plants flowering in dramatic natural settings. Thanks to the country’s diverse climates and remarkable biodiversity, each season delivers distinctive floral displays — often accompanied by native birds and insects that add sound, movement and life to the landscape.

New Zealand’s flora is the result of millions of years of isolation. Around 80% of the country’s trees, ferns and flowering plants are endemic, meaning they are found nowhere else on Earth. Despite its small landmass, the country supports an extraordinary range of vegetation, from subtropical forests in the north to alpine herb fields in the south. For travellers, this means a constantly changing botanical journey as they move through regions and landscapes.

As Catherine Beard, Senior Flora and Ecosystems Science Advisor at the Department of Conservation (DOC), explains:

“International visitors arriving during spring and early summer can expect landscapes alive with golden kōwhai flowers which attract native birds; scarlet pōhutukawa, also known as New Zealand’s Christmas tree; and white or pink blossoms of mānuka, a plant already famous for the distinctive honey that is produced from it.”

When to visit New Zealand to see the native plants flowering

The best time to see New Zealand’s native plants in bloom is **spring through early summer (September to February)**, when warmer temperatures and longer days trigger flowering across much of the country. Spring brings fresh, uplifting colour, while summer delivers iconic coastal and forest spectacles.

“Visit in spring and summer (September through to February) to see many plants coming into bloom.”

Where to see native New Zealand plants flowering

Spring highlights (September to November)

Spring marks a time of renewal across New Zealand’s natural landscapes. [Kōwhai](#) trees begin flowering along riverbanks, roadsides and regional parks nationwide, their bright golden blooms attracting tūī and other native birds.

“Spring arrives with bright, uplifting colour. Kōwhai trees burst into golden bloom along riverbanks and regional parks nationwide, attracting tūi and other native birds.”

Along forest edges and walking tracks, [native clematis \(puawānanga\)](#) drapes through the bush with delicate, star-shaped white flowers, while flowering [cabbage trees \(tī kōuka\)](#) add height and character to wetlands and rural landscapes.

“Native clematis (puawānanga) drapes edges of forests and walking tracks with delicate star-shaped, white flowers. Flowering cabbage tree/tī kōuka bring a uniquely New Zealand flavour to rural and wetland landscapes.”

Spring is ideal for short hikes and nature walks, where visitors can experience both the blooms and the wildlife they attract.

“Springtime hike with kōwhai and clematis— Take a short walk in New Zealand bush and take a moment to experience the flowers, and the native species they draw in.”

Summer icons (December to February)

Summer brings some of New Zealand’s most recognisable floral moments. Along northern coastlines, [pōhutukawa](#) trees burst into vivid red bloom, creating iconic scenes above beaches and bays.

“Coastal pōhutukawa — Head to the beaches around Northland, Auckland, the Coromandel, and the Bay of Plenty with a picnic to enjoy an iconic kiwi summer evening.”

Notable places to see pōhutukawa include:

- [Cape Reinga](#) (Northland) - the most spiritually significant place in New Zealand for Māori with an ancient pōhutukawa tree marking this special location)
- [Mangawhai Cliffs Walkway](#) (Northland)
- [Rangitoto Island](#) (Auckland) - The [summit track](#) winds through the [world’s largest pōhutukawa forest](#)
- [Pōhutukawa Coast](#) (Auckland)
- Coastal routes throughout the [Hauraki Coromandel](#) and Bay of Plenty

In the South Island, summer is also the season of **southern rātā**, which can transform forested hillsides into sweeping crimson canopies — particularly in Fiordland and along the West Coast. Check out the [rātā display in South Westland](#) from summer 2024/2025.

“In summer Pōhutukawa blooms along coastal landscapes with vivid red flowers, especially along the Coromandel Peninsula and Northland. In the South Island, southern rātā can transform forested hillsides into crimson canopies, particularly in Fiordland and the West Coast, creating striking, large-scale natural spectacles.”

Meanwhile, [mānuka](#) flowers from late spring into summer across much of New Zealand, from wetlands and river gravels to hillsides and low alpine regions. While best known internationally for its honey, seeing mānuka in bloom offers visitors a deeper connection to its role in New Zealand’s ecosystems.

In the South Island mountains, early summer also brings the flowering of the [Mount Cook buttercup](#), the world's largest buttercup. This alpine species can be seen in places such as the Hooker Valley in Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park, one of the most accessible locations to view alpine flowers in bloom.

Discover more New Zealand native plants here: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-plants/>

Check out short walks recommended by Department of Conservation here:

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/things-to-do/walking-and-tramping/short-walks/>

Native gardens and sanctuaries to experience New Zealand flora

- Whangārei Quarry Gardens, Northland
- Auckland Botanic Gardens, Auckland
- Hamilton Gardens, Waikato
- Waikereru Ecosanctuary, Gisborne
- Eastwoodhill Arboretum, Gisborne
- Waipahihi Botanical Gardens, Taupō
- Pukekura Park, New Plymouth - walking trails through native bush
- Wellington Gardens, Wellington
- Te Kainga Marire, New Plymouth
- Zealandia, Wellington - Kōwhai lines walking tracks and lake edges, creating excellent bird-watching opportunities
- Otari-Wilton's Bush, Wellington
- Christchurch Botanic Gardens, Canterbury
- Ōtepoti Dunedin Botanic Gardens, Otago
- Moturau Moana Native Gardens, Rakiura / Stewart Island, Southland
- Discover more native New Zealand gardens here: <https://www.gardens.org.nz/visit>

Expert insights on New Zealand's native plants

**Catherine Beard, Senior Flora and Ecosystems Science Advisor,
Department of Conservation**

Expert insight from the Department of Conservation (DOC) provides context on New Zealand's native plants, ecosystems and seasonal flowering patterns.

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Where should visitors go to find flowering New Zealand native plants:

- “Coastal pōhutukawa — Head to the beaches around Northland, Auckland, the Coromandel, and the Bay of Plenty with a picnic to enjoy an iconic kiwi summer evening.”
- “Springtime hike with kōwhai and clematis— Take a short walk in New Zealand bush and take a moment to experience the flowers, and the native species they draw in.”