

PROPAGATION AND CULTURE OF RAOULIAS

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These ground cover plants are, as far as I know, endemic to New Zealand and some are still awaiting identification. On the whole they are riverbed or high mountain plants and they grow in very exposed and poor conditions. The majority are mat plants some extending to six or eight feet across. Most are grey in colour and felty in texture owing to the fine hair covering. They can be divided into two types: one, the "Vegetable Sheep" type, comes from the mountainous regions, mainly in the South Island. These grow in big silvery hummocks, hence the name, but are somewhat difficult to grow in the North Island owing to climatic variation. The second type, known as "scabweeds", inhabit riverbeds down to sea level and are thus more suitable for growing in the North Island. Two of the most popular types are the silvery-coloured, *Raoulia hookeri*, and *R. eximia*, which is grown extensively overseas. In New Zealand most cultivars are still treated as collector's items, with the exception of those already mentioned.

The "Vegetable Sheep" type are difficult to propagate and there are only two or three people in the North Island growing them. All cultivars can be grown from cuttings taken *in situ* from plants in their native habitat or from plants which have become "acclimatised" to the northern conditions. Remove the dead leaves at the base of the cuttings and insert in coarse sand and place in shade outside. They will not stand close humid conditions inside and take about three months to root.

The more easily rooted cultivars can be grown simply by division which is best done in the autumn, the pieces being set in a tray of pumice-sand, placed under cover for a week and then shifted outside. Harden in stages then shift out into full sun for a further six weeks when a nice compact root system is formed. Sand appears to be essential for this first period but they can then be potted up into a 50/50 peat-sand mix with 8 lbs. MagAmp and 4 lbs. lime added per yard.

Raoulias can also be grown from seed but this is a rather long process.

Most cultivars are relatively slow growing but are becoming popular for rockeries and will stand tremendous traffic (e.g. those planted around some of the hydro-electricity stations). Very few pests seem to attack them apart from a small leaf-roller caterpillar which can be easily controlled with Malathion.