

# New Zealand natives for hedging and screening<sup>©</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

It has become very obvious that many of the selections of hedge plants introduced to New Zealand have become environmental disasters. Examples of this include gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), privet (*Ligustrum* spp.), *Acmena* spp. (lillypilly), and *Berberis* spp. to name a few.

Others such as *Buxus* spp. have a dreadful smell and are susceptible to rust while various species and cultivars of conifers are susceptible to fungal diseases resulting in large areas of die back. It appears that this is spread by hedge trimmers while poor pruning methods are also to blame.

## NEW ZEALAND NATIVES

With this in mind, we have been planting New Zealand native trees and shrubs in various situations to get some idea on how frost and wind hardy they are, how tolerant are they to drought and wet conditions and what is their ultimate size without pruning is.

New Zealand has an amazing array of shrubby trees that fit the bill including *Pittosporum*, *Muehlenbeckia*, *Lophomyrtus*, *Coprosma*, *Myrsine*, *Melicytus*, *Corokia*, and *Olearia*. These are all readily available and these have been used over a number of years for wind breaks, but there are other species that have been very rarely planted for garden hedges and ornamental situations. Many of these that could be used are perhaps slower to grow for some in a nursery situation but are ideal in garden situations as they require little or no pruning and training. A number of these species that have been tried are of divaricating or filiramulate form.

### *Pittosporum*

Starting with *Pittosporum*, there are about seven species we have tried. The taller ones include *P. obcordatum* which grows to 3 m high and is a mass of bronze twigs. A great windbreak for most soils and will tolerate wet situations. *Pittosporum turnerii* also grows to 3 m and has very narrow, silvery growth and grows well in shady positions.

Smaller growing species include *P. anomalum* which grows to 1 m high with tight dark brown growth and pale cream flowers. *Pittosporum crassicaule* reaches 50 cm high and is very slow growing with tight growth and black flowers. *Pittosporum rigidum* grows 1 m high with narrow dark twigs. All these *Pittosporum* have perfumed flowers at night! All grow from cuttings or seeds which can take some time to germinate.

### *Melicytus*

*Melicytus*, which can look like *Buxus* species, can be trimmed into small hedges or topiaries such as turkeys or elephants as the mood takes. Forms of *M. obovatus* have been very good some reach 1.5 m down to 50 cm in height. *Melicytus crassifolius* is an excellent tiny hedge and has several forms, also some hybrids that are well worth trying. It provides food for lizards, moths, etc. All *Melicytus* are very long lived.

*Myrsine divaricata* will take damp soils and freezing if South Island forms are used. It is also tolerant of salt winds and is a slow growing tangled twiggy shrub, but will grow into a larger tree over time. *Myrsine divaricata* 'Poor Knights', now known as *M. aqualonia*, is also great for coastal and drier windy sites. A must mention is the related *Elingamita johnsonii* which makes a great hedge for salt windy coastal conditions. It is a small shrubby tree but must have good drainage and no frost.

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### **Coprosma**

There are a huge number of *Coprosma* suitable for coastal windy conditions. Some may need trimming to keep them under control but the narrow, taller growing species form a windbreak to 3-4 m high. *Coprosma virescens* is possibly the best with orange or pink stemmed twigs, doesn't require much trimming and great fruit for the birds. *Coprosma rhamnoides* has great potential also with its many forms and leaf colours and will also tolerate shade and a range of sites.

### **Muehlenbeckia**

*Muehlenbeckia complexa* will soon cover any space, but with training and trimming it can make any old fence into a work of art. *Muehlenbeckia astonii* grows up to 2 m high and forms cloud shape hedges. *Metrosideros perforata* inter planted with *Metrosideros carminea* will make a nice flowering hedge with not much trimming or can be planted to cover a wall so it looks like a hedge.

### **Ozothamnus**

*Ozothamnus* species grow to 1 to 2 m high forming a bushy shrub that will grow in the most dreadfully windy, salty, and sandy sites. They have a range of grey or golden leaf forms with masses of tiny daisy flowers for native bees.

### **Daisy family**

Most of the daisy family are tricky in a nursery situation as many get root rots in summer due to over watering, but are fine when planted out and provide plenty of flowers over their silvery foliage in many cases. One for a wetter site is *Olearia solandri* which also has an amazing perfume as do several members of the *Olearia* family.

### **Tree species**

There are several tree species that are worth a mention, but note these are not for all sites due to the size they can grow over time. Many can be trained and trimmed quite happily if this is the desired look. Examples include *Carpodetus serratus*, *Corynocarpus laevigatus*, *Griselinia*, *Hoheria angustifolia* or *H. sexstylosa*, *Kunzea*, *Leptospermum*, *Libocedrus*, *Metrosideros excelsa* or *M. robusta*, *Planchonella costata*, *Podocarpus totara*, and *Streblus*. Just remember what's on the label is not necessarily always correct in terms of information.