



## REWAREWA (*Knightsia excelsa*)

Rewarewa belongs to the Proteaceae family, found mainly in Australia and South Africa, and there are only three species of *Knightsia*, two in New Caledonia and one in New Zealand. *Knightsia* was named after the botanist Thomas Knight, a previous President of the London Horticultural Society, while *excelsa* is Latin for lofty or high. Rewarewa is found throughout the North Island and in the Marlborough Sounds, mainly in forests on the lowlands and lower parts of mountains.

The rewarewa grows up to 30 metres tall, with a trunk up to 1 metre in diameter. The wood is attractive, with grain similar to plane or honeysuckle. The tree has long leathery leaves looking rather like bread knives with teeth on both edges. Rewarewa is also called the New Zealand honeysuckle, "the bucket of water tree" (because the wood is too wet to use for firewood), or the New Zealand bottlebrush.

The tree's flowers are in spiky dark red velvet brushes of many flowers (with up to 80 flowers) that open with four narrow petals at the base and a yellow pistil sticking out. Rewarewa flowers are quite sweet smelling, and birds such as tuis and bellbirds are attracted by the nectar. The fruit is a woody capsule that splits open to release winged seeds that spin to the ground. Māori suggest that the rewarewa seedpod is the model for Māori canoes, right down to the figurehead. The inner part of rewarewa bark was used by Māori to bandage wounds to reduce bleeding and promote healing, but the wood was not much used.

Rewarewa is hard to dry with severe distortion (considerable tangential shrinkage) and cracking, but when dry it is heavy, hard and very wear-resistant. It should be worked with the grain, and can be planed, turned and sanded with ease, although it has a tendency to tear and does not hold a good edge.

The timber is attractive, with a grain similar to silky oak (with which it can be confused) and plane, especially on quarter-sawn surfaces. The dry sapwood is a silvery pink-brown, while the heart-wood has a red speckled colour ranging from dark pink through to richer red with an interesting beautiful figure. The figure can be too flamboyant for large pieces, which may be a reason why it has been popular for inlay, strips, and other ornamental woodwork since cabinet-making commenced in New Zealand. It also has good acoustic qualities, making it suitable for making musical instruments, and is also often used for hand-tool handles. It is difficult to season without cracking distortion and tends to move after turning. It tends to be tricky to work and challenging to the turner, but takes a good finish.

Possible health risks: none known. Density 740 kg/m<sup>3</sup>



*Rewarewa may tower above regenerating forest but are an integral part of the canopy of mature forest.*



*Juvenile leaves (below) are much narrower than adult leaves (above).*

