



MATAI (*PROMNOPYTIS TAXIFOLIA*)

Matai is a slow growing tree, making its grain close, even and dense. It is one of our finest forest trees, a softwood growing throughout New Zealand, and being most abundant in the central North Island. The tree is well-proportioned, growing to 25 metres, with a diameter around 1.5 metres.

The mature Matai has a regular trunk with smooth dark grey flaky “hammer-marked” bark comprised of rounded flakes, and a broad crown supported by substantial branches. Larger, older trees may have hollow centres. The newly cut wood (with a distinctive dank odour) has varied colours, ranging from cream, yellow, amber, and through to deep brown, and on exposure to air tends to darken to a deep red-brown. The grain in the trunk is very straight with a fine, even texture, and it machines well.

The heartwood is strong, tough and durable (but not in contact with the ground). Māori used Matai for canoes, lighter agricultural implements, adze hafts, and palisade construction, and particularly in the Whanganui area it was used as much as Totara for carving. Earlier European uses included weatherboards, flooring and many joinery purposes, and it is still highly valued as an attractive, hard-wearing flooring timber.

Matai dries well with minimal distortion and is very stable. It is therefore very suitable for making furniture, large bowls and platters, lidded boxes, and hollow forms. Matai is relatively easy to work and to turn on the lathe, and it produces a lustrous silky finish (but heat cracks need to be avoided), and resists damage from knocks. Some polyurethane finishes may not set properly on Matai. Its stump wood is particularly sought by woodturners, often having swirling grain with rich colour variations. Burr wood is also highly prized.

Possible health risks: none known

Density 610 kg/m³



One of our finest forest trees. Photo: DOC

