

Trees and Us

by
Philip
Simpson

There are many kinds of trees in Aotearoa New Zealand, and every kind of tree is different. Each one has a different kind of leaf, bark, flower, and seed. Every tree is special.

Tāne, atua of the forest

In te ao Māori, Tāne is atua of the forest. He created the trees and the birds that live in them. Tōtara was the greatest of the trees because its huge, straight trunk could be used to make waka. Tōtara could also be split into slabs and used for whakairo (carving). The carvings were like the pages of a book telling the history of the whānau. The thick bark of tōtara could be used to make baskets to store food.



Pou at the entrance to Titokorangi Forest, Rotorua, representing Tuteata, a tupuna of the tangata whenua.

Why are trees special?

Trees help us and all living things on Earth.

» Trees provide food for us and other creatures

We get food, such as fruits and nuts, from trees. Bees make honey from the nectar of tree flowers, and nectar is also food for tūi and other birds.



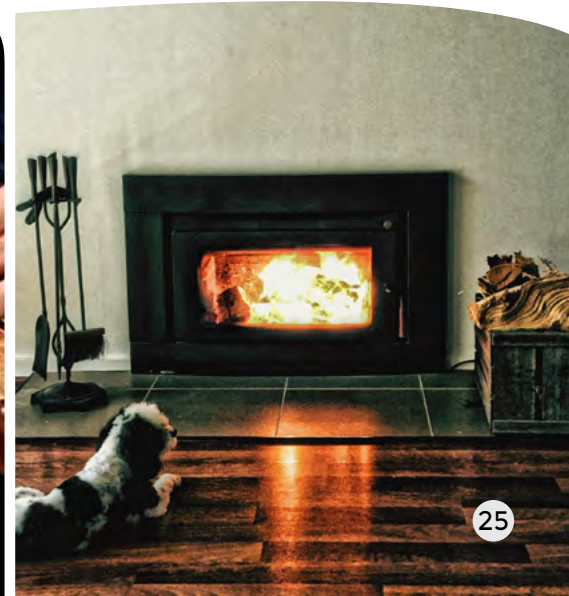
» Trees protect and enrich the soil

Tree roots hold on to the soil and help prevent it from washing away in floods and storms. When leaves and branches fall to the ground, they rot and break down so that, after a long time, they become part of the soil. This makes the soil rich and fertile, which helps plants to grow.



» Trees provide us with wood

We use wood for building, for carving, for making things such as furniture, bowls, musical instruments, and ornaments, and even for making paper. We also burn wood in fireplaces to keep us warm.



» Trees can provide medicine

Some trees, such as kawakawa and mānuka, have leaves, flowers, or bark that can be used to make medicine.

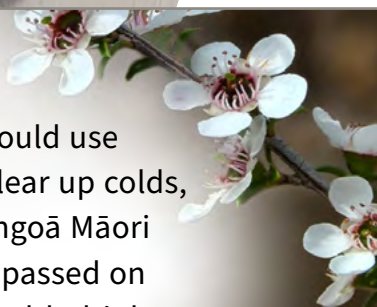
The oil from mānuka leaves can kill bacteria.



Kawakawa oil can calm itchy skin.

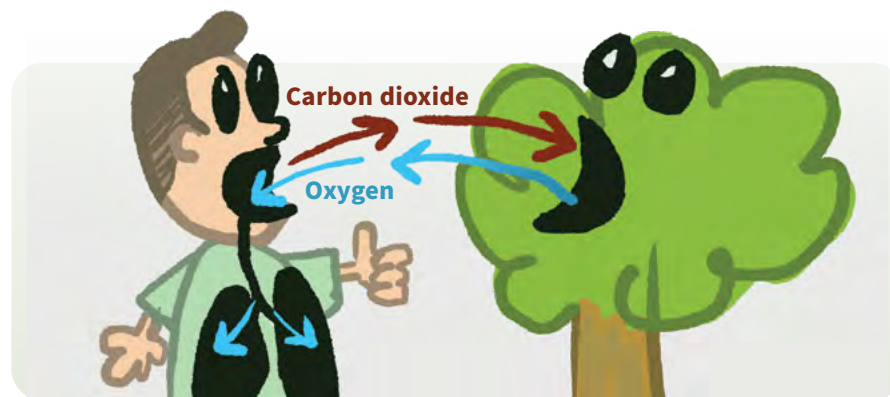
Rongoā Māori

Tipuna Māori knew which trees they could use to help reduce pain, calm itchy skin, clear up colds, or heal wounds. This knowledge of rongoā Māori (traditional Māori medicine) has been passed on and is still used to make ointments, health drinks, and medicines.



» Trees purify the air we breathe

Trees use carbon dioxide from the air to make their food, and they “breathe out” oxygen through their leaves. This is where the oxygen that we breathe comes from. Trees are like the world’s lungs – breathing in and out and purifying the air.



» Trees help prevent global warming

When there is too much carbon dioxide in the air, the air gets warmer. This is called global warming. Global warming makes it harder for all living things to survive. But trees can help stop global warming because they take carbon dioxide out of the air.



Trees in danger

Trees can be in danger from pests and diseases. Pests such as possums and deer eat the leaves, and this can kill trees. Some kauri trees are being killed by a disease that attacks the roots and bark of the trees. In some places, people are not allowed to enter the forest because the disease can be spread on people's boots and shoes.



Caring for trees

It's important that we look after trees. When a tree dies, we can no longer use the special gifts of that tree, and the insects and birds that depend on it lose their home. People can help by:

- » planting more trees
- » making sure that people don't cut down too many trees
- » protecting trees from diseases and pests.

We need trees, so we need to take care of them. Imagine a world without trees.



A kauri tree killed by disease

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