

Origins of pōhutukawa cultivars in Australia

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In a previous article on pōhutukawa (Dawson et al., 2010a), the authors included a page (p. 20) that profiled *Metrosideros excelsa* and *M. kermadecensis* cultivars of uncertain origin.

Thanks to correspondence with my Australian colleagues, origins of four variegated cultivars can be clarified here.

***M. excelsa* 'Golden Dawn':**

an uncommon Australian-raised cultivar overlooked by Dawson et al. (2010a) and Dawson and Heenan (2010). In about 2002–2003, Robert Harrison of Greenhills Propagation Nursery noticed that a tissue-cultured plantlet of *M. excelsa* 'Pink Lady' started to grow a variegated golden leaf. His nursery propagated this material by cuttings through three vegetative generations to ensure it was stable then placed it into tissue culture for commercial release (Robert Harrison, pers. comm.). They named it "Golden Dawn" after the reverse variegation – its leaves are golden yellow in the centres with green outer margins. Like its parent, *M. 'Pink Lady'*, it has compact heads of pinkish flowers (Fig. 1). *M. 'Golden Dawn'* is no longer grown at Greenhills Propagation Nursery because perhaps 10–20% of the plants are inclined to revert (typical of some other variegated selections of *Metrosideros* such as *M. kermadecensis* 'Sunninghill'). However, it is available from other nurseries in Australia (e.g., Garden Express online nursery, 2011) and is probably now propagated through cuttings.

M. 'Lemon Twist':

Dawson et al. (2010a) commented that this new Australian-raised cultivar is low growing and named after its reverse-variegated and unusual twisted foliage.

M. 'Lemon Twist' (Fig. 2A–C) arose in 2006–2007 as a gold variegated side-branch mutation from a low



Fig. 1 *Metrosideros excelsa* 'Golden Dawn', a reverse-variegated cultivar with pinkish flowers. Photo: Greenhills Propagation Nursery.

growing selection of *Metrosideros*. The variegation was discovered by John Seet (pers. comm.) of Benara Nurseries, and was propagated through cuttings by John to assess the stability of its variegation. *M. 'Lemon Twist'* has Australian Plant Breeder's Rights (PBR; accepted 9 April 2010) and is commercially available (Benara Nurseries online catalogue, 2011).

M. 'Dalese' (Dawson et al., 2010a) has the same low growing habit with short internodes but is non-variegated. Other than this difference in variegation, *M. 'Dalese'* and *M. 'Lemon Twist'* are very similar and probably share the same parentage. Both were said to have been selections of *M. excelsa*, but the low growth habit is most unusual for *M. excelsa*, and known for some selections and hybrids of *M. collina* (such as *M. 'Red Baby'*; Terry Keogh, pers. comm.). It would be worth critically checking what species these two cultivars belong to.

M. 'Mini Christmas' (Dawson et al., 2010b) is another low growing Australian cultivar whose parentage may be similar and is worth re-evaluating. It is also called *M. 'Mini Xmas'* and *M. excelsa nana* 'Mini Christmas' in various nursery

catalogues. Unfortunately, I have been unable to track down further details of it.

***M. excelsa* 'Midas':**

as noted by Dawson et al. (2010a), this reverse-variegated cultivar is currently available in Australia and New Zealand. It has bluntly pointed leaves with golden-yellow centres and green outer margins, and the young stems are red.

According to Robert Harrison (pers. comm.), *M. 'Midas'* was raised by William (Bill) Robertson. Before he retired, Bill operated the Baxter Wholesale Nursery, at Baxter, Victoria, Australia. In about 1988, he found the variegation as a side-branch sport on a non-variegated *M. excelsa* tree and had Greenhills Propagation Nursery propagate plants from cuttings. Australian Plant Breeders Rights (PBR) were applied for and accepted in October 1990, but withdrawn in 1992. The variegation of *M. 'Midas'* is somewhat unstable and reverts as plants get older. As with other cultivars, this can be largely overcome if pruned regularly to maintain the variegation.

***M. kermadecensis* 'Cream Ridge':**

Dawson et al. (2010a) stated that this selection has red flowers and red stems with small variegated leaves

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that are green margined with creamy-white. They pointed out that the name *M. 'Cream Ridge'* is used in Australia but not in New Zealand and that they did not know if it was a new selection raised in Australia or an existing cultivar that has been renamed.

Robert Harrison (pers. comm.) provided me with further information. He purchased a variegated plant from a retail nursery in New Zealand in the early 1990s. Robert exported the parent plant to Australia where his nursery (Greenhills Propagation Nursery) has a quarantine facility from which it was released and propagated through cuttings. To be more marketable, they may well have renamed the New Zealand material (e.g., from *Metrosideros kermadecensis* 'Variegata') to *M. kermadecensis* 'Cream Ridge'.

It is also possible that *M. kermadecensis* 'Gala' (Dawson et al., 2010a) is a New Zealand selection that has been renamed in Australia. Material under that name is also sold in California but I have not uncovered further details of it.

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Fig. 2A–C *Metrosideros* 'Lemon Twist', a reverse-variegated cultivar with red flowers. Photos: Benara Nurseries.

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