

Old Dogs Teaching Young Chicks Old Tricks with a Twist

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Summary

Several old propagation methods have been successful on a small number of native species; two-metre-long trimmed branches of *Metrosideros* have rooted, hammer cuttings

are recommended for some species where there is limited material, and horseshoe cuttings of king fern produce fernlets within a few months.

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1970's, I was helping to eliminate feral cats on Hauturu Island (Little Barrier Island). The dense bush was magic, huge trees of many species some rarely seen on the mainland. Outstanding was a very large *Vitex* possibly hundreds of years old, where large branches wept down to the

earth. Some had produced roots and new trees had arisen. These had again grown, and later branches had done what the original tree had and rooted, producing more large trees, eventually into three generations of very amazing trees.

In our nursery area are stands of *Vitex* with many other species of native trees. One still day one of the old *Vitex* fell across the main track. The top 3 metres was sawn off and the 4-metre trunk pushed to one side. A large hole was dug for the top to be planted so climbers and stag horn ferns could be planted on it and around it. Steel waratahs and re-bar with concrete were placed around the outside to hold the top in place. To our amazement this top would grow for several years and finally came to its demise in a summer drought. We have since found large young cuttings are much better.

On a trip to the Coromandel, I was shown a vast *Metrosideros* that had done a similar thing as the *Vitex* on Hauturu. It also had produced many young trees from where the large branches had touched the earth, so I figured we would give this a try. I pruned some large branches of my old *Metrosideros* in the garden, these I cut into 2 metre lengths and proceeded to plant them with a post rammer. They are now large trees 25 years old. From this we have figured many other natives have the potential to be propagated in this way.

Hammer cuttings

Sixty years ago, when working at John Pettit's Nursery I was asked to propagate a variegated *Pisonia brunoniana* by cuttings. They always took months to grow roots, so I tried hammer cuttings. These are single buds with a small part of the leaf stem and only a tiny part of the main stem. These seem to grow roots quite fast and produce shoots within 4-6 months later. We have since also produced plants of *Pennantia baylisiana* and *Hedycarya arborea* by this method. When there is limited material, this may be a way of bulking up stock from other thick, juicy stem species.

Horseshoe cuttings

The major species is the *Ptisana salicina*, king fern (similar to the tropical *Angiopteris evecta*). The whole stipe is wrenched from the base, there should be a horseshoe shaped end. The stipe is shortened to 30cm and planted into sand. In a few months young fernlets are produced and can be detached when large enough. Other ferns can also be grown by this method.