Growing Your Kōwhai Seeds

Plant a seed. Grow something beautiful.

Your kōwhai seeds are a small gift from Whānau Mercy Ministries through Kākano Atawhai, an invitation to grow something beautiful and to think about the difference you can make in the world.

Kōwhai is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most recognisable native trees, celebrated for its golden-yellow flowers that provide food for native birds, including tūī and korimako (bellbirds).

The seeds you have received are **Sophora microphylla**, commonly known as small-leaved kōwhai. This species is native to Aotearoa and can be grown throughout the country, from Te Tai Tokerau to Murihiku. It is adaptable to a range of conditions, although young trees may need protection from frost, strong winds and prolonged dry periods.

Kōwhai symbolises strength, resilience and new beginnings, qualities will serve you well as you leave college.

How to grow your kōwhai

1. Prepare your seeds

Kōwhai seeds have a hard outer coating that needs a little help to allow water inside.

Using the small piece of sandpaper included in your seed packet, gently rub one side of each seed until you begin to see a lighter colour beneath the surface. Take care not to damage the inside of the seed.

This process is called *scarification* and helps the seed germinate.

2. Soak overnight

Place your prepared seeds in a cup of room-temperature water and leave them to soak for 12–24 hours.

This helps the seeds absorb water and begin the germination process.

3. Plant your seeds

Fill a small pot with moist seed-raising mix.

Plant your seeds approximately 5–10 mm deep, covering them lightly with soil.

Water gently.

4. Find a warm spot

Place your pot somewhere warm and bright, away from harsh direct sunlight.

Keep the soil moist but not waterlogged.

Kōwhai can be grown throughout Aotearoa, but germination may take longer in cooler parts of the country.

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5. Watch for new life!

With the right conditions, your seeds may begin to sprout within 2–4 weeks, although some will take longer.

Be patient! Every seed grows in its own time.

6. Help your kōwhai flourish

Once your seedlings have developed several sets of leaves and are growing strongly, transfer them into larger pots.

When your tree is well established, it can be planted outside in a sunny or partly shaded location with well-drained soil.

Protect young trees from frost, strong winds and drying out until they become established.

Your kōwhai may take several years to produce its first beautiful yellow flowers, but with care it can grow into a tree that will be enjoyed for generations.

A little care: Kōwhai seeds are poisonous if eaten. Keep them away from young children and pets, and wash your hands after handling them.

Growing Mercy

Every kōwhai begins as a small seed.

With the right conditions, care and patience, that seed can grow into something extraordinary — a tree that provides shelter, beauty and nourishment for the life around it.

Mercy grows in much the same way.

A small act of kindness, the courage to stand alongside someone in need, or a willingness to speak up for justice can make a difference far beyond what we might imagine.

As you nurture your kōwhai, we invite you to think about the seeds of Mercy you carry with you.

What needs do you see in the world around you?

What seeds of Mercy will you plant?

What will you help grow?

Through Kākano Atawhai, we hope to connect young people who want to carry the Mercy spirit into the future — growing friendships, sharing ideas and finding ways to make a difference in their communities.

Small beginnings can lead to extraordinary things.