

## New Addition to the Epiphyte Garden



20 October 2023

For those of you wondering about the new structure that's appeared discreetly in the Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Epiphyte Garden, a 'rātā shrine' is what you're looking at. It's quite a special story. Adam Ellis works in creative fields; industrial product design and urban public gardens, integrating designed structural elements within lived landscapes. He also loves rātā.

Decades ago, Adam volunteered at Ōtari supported by Anita Benbrook. He learned so much from the gardeners and botanists that he wanted to 'give back', so recently approached manager Tim Park with an idea to design a 'living structure' that celebrates rātā. He's built a few other iterations around the country but none like this one.

True to the Ōtari ethos of celebrating and protecting rare native plants, this new structure features the white-flowering rātā moehau (Bartlett's rātā, *Metrosideros barlettii*) which is close to extinction. Only thirteen plants remain in the wild in the Far North.

Most rātā begin life as epiphytes and some grow into trees. This tripod-shaped structure is designed to rot away over time and its supports are filled with sphagnum that will host tendrils reaching to the ground from the rātā planted at the top. It will take many years, but eventually, all going well, the plant will become a self-supporting tree.

We are grateful for Adam's creative inspiration, to Ōtari staff who enabled the project, and especially for the generosity of John Randall, who funded the project as a living memorial to his late wife Robin, daughter of noted botanist, photographer, and Ōtari supporter, Olaf John.

*Written by Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust*