**Introduction**

*Sophora howinsula*, commonly known as lignum vitae (named by early English settlers because its timber durability is similar to that of the Caribbean tree of that name) or Lord Howe kōwhai, is a flowering plant in the legume family. The specific name refers to the island to which the species is endemic (how and insula meaning island). It is locally common, scattered distribution through the island’s lowland hills and is situated in the 21st Century Garden.

- In GBG there is a *Sophora macrocarpa* from Chile near the Cork Oak, a *Sophora microphylla* from NZ in the Shrubbery and a *Sophora toromiro* (which is extinct in its native Rapa Nui (Easter Island) in the 21st Century Garden.
- Kōwhai (*Sophora*) is New Zealand’s National Flower (kōwhai meaning yellow in Maori).
- There are 61 species of *Sophora* accepted by the Plant List.
- The seeds of *Sophora* can survive in sea water for at least 3 years which allows them to move between islands in the south Pacific.
- There are 17 closely related species (or subspecies) in Lord Howe Island (LHI), New Zealand (with 8 endemic species), the Chatham Island, Raivavae, Rapa, Marquesas, Masafeura, Masaiterra, Chile, Easter Island, Gough Island and Reunion. All these are in the southern hemisphere.
- Many of these islands are part of the submerged continent of Zealandia. This continent includes NZ and its islands, Lord Howe, Norfolk as well as others.
• The seeds of S. howinsula are eaten by rats that were introduced to LHI via ships and their cargo. Rats are a major problem for the survival of the rare and endemic flora of LHI.

Description
It is a tree, growing to 10 m, sometimes 15 m, in height. The pinnate leaves are 5–10 cm long. The 1.5 - 2 cm long yellow pea flowers are produced racemose inflorescences (meaning the flowers develop in a cluster on short stalks of equal length along a central stem). The 7 -12 cm long pods each contain 5 -10 smooth, orange-brown, ellipsoidal, 7 mm long seeds. The flowering season is from mid-July to mid-September.

The timber is protected by oils that remain after the tree has been felled. These oils protect the timber from attack by insects and fungi. In fact, there are houses on LHI whose stumps made from this tree are still supporting the floor after 100 years. In addition to house stumps, the hard, durable wood was used for fence posts.

Cultivation/Propagation:
S. howinsula is a slow growing, small tree. It is relatively easy to propagate from semi-ripe shoot material taken from the top-most part of the tree. If propagating from seed it must be noted that the seed-coat is very hard and needs to be chipped with a file or knife. Seeds should then be soaked in warm water overnight and sown in equal mix of moist coir and sharp grit positioned vertically and kept moist. If fresh, germination should occur within 21 days. It is best to plant them out into their final positions as soon as possible so as not to check their growth. This plant is relatively pest-free in cultivation.

References:
1. wikipedia.org
4. www.theplantlist.org
8. TERRAIN (Taranaki Educational Resource: Research, Analysis and Information Network)

**Family**: Fabaceae  
**Subfamily**: Faboideae  
**Tribe**: Sophoreae  
**Genus**: Sophora  
**Species**: Sophora howinsula  
**Synonym**: Sophora tetraptera var. howinsula  
**Common names**: Lord Howe Kowhai, Lord Howe’s 'ironwood', Lignum Vitae

**Sophora macrocarpa**  
Left Photo: Penarc.de.wikipedia.org  
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Right: GBG.

**Sophora toromiro**  
Jardín Botánico de Barcelona  
Photo: Consultaplantas.commons.wikimedia.org  
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Map of the submerged continent, Zealandia, showing the location of Lord Howe Island. The continuous black line marks the edge of the continental shelf. Topography based on bathymetry data from Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California, San Diego.  
Image: Ulrich Lange.pl.wikipedia.org  
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Geelong Botanic Gardens Map

Sophora howinsula
Lignum vitæ or Lord Howe Island Kowhai

Sophora toromiro
Toromiro

Sophora microphylla
Weeping Kowhai

Sophora macrocarpa
Mayu

This information was prepared by Lucy Pope
Volunteer Guide
Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens

www.friendsgbg.org.au