

What are Māori Patterns?

 [twinkl.co.nz/teaching-wiki/maori-patterns](https://www.twinkl.co.nz/teaching-wiki/maori-patterns)

Māori Patterns

One common style of Māori patterns are known as Kōwhaiwhai patterns. They are a traditional art form from Aotearoa New Zealand. They are often found in and around Māori meeting houses known as wharenui. These beautiful designs also have different meanings behind them.

Kōwhaiwhai patterns are most often found on the ridge pole - tāhū - or the rafters - heke - in a meeting house - wharenui.

The Kōwhaiwhai patterns are Māori history recorded by Māori. The tāhū Kōwhaiwhai tell the tribal genealogy, recording ancestors. The heke Kōwhaiwhai represent branches of the family - whanau. You can see how, together, this would form something similar to what we might see as a family tree.

As such, it is no surprise that Kōwhaiwhai patterns differ from tribe to tribe, as they are derived from the environment where the tribe exists. They represent the mana of the house, ancestors and people.

Traditionally, Kōwhaiwhai patterns were red, black and white. Red represents warmth, blood and life. White represents purity, promise for the future and awakening. Black represents the earth. Some believed the amount of red or black in a pattern might be related to the amount of prosperity an ancestor brought to the tribe.

Examples of Māori Patterns

Here is a selection of different Māori patterns with pictures and an explanation of what each one represents.

Koru: the most common Māori pattern found in a Kōwhaiwhai. The Koru or pītau is based on the unfurled shoot of a fern. It is also used to depict waves in the ocean, energy flow and even personified to represent members of a family.



Koiri: The koiri is the koru pattern repeating and turning back into itself. This may continue into infinity. The koiri is a symbol of self-reflection and nurturing. It also means to flourish.



Mangōpare: The mangōpare is an artistic Māori design used in a Kōwhaiwhai pattern. It represents the hammerhead shark. It is a symbol of strength, courage and power.



Puhoro: The puhoro pattern is a split koru. It can represent speed, swiftness and agility in Māori culture. In other depictions, the puhoro can be representative of storms and tempestuous situations.



Pātiki: The pātiki represents the flounder and is a symbolises favourable times, generosity and abundant hospitality.



Ngaru: The ngaru represents the ocean waves - the cutting of the waves as the waka travelled. Māori origin narratives explain the arrival of Māori to Aotearoa on waka (canoes).



Kōwhai Ngutukākā: The kōwhai ngutukākā can be found in a Kōwhaiwai pattern. It represents the flowers of the kākā beak plant. Ngutukākā is indicative of the beak of a kākā, a native bird to New Zealand.



Rauru: This shape is similar to the spiral, and it shares a similar meaning to a koru, representing new life, growth, strength and peace.



Ngutukākā or Marama: When this Māori pattern is referred to as 'ngutukākā', this shape is the beak of the kākā bird. When it is 'marama', it refers to the Moon.



Key Facts About Māori Patterns

Here are some helpful facts about Māori patterns to help you understand them in more detail.

- Kōwhaiwhai patterns can be made by drawing shapes and symbols repeated multiple times.
- These patterns are traditionally coloured red, black and white.
- A long repeated pattern is known as a frieze.
- The Kōwhaiwhai patterns can contain Māori history and can be used to tell stories.
- Each symbol in a pattern has a different meaning, and each one is very special to Māori culture. They can be found all around New Zealand.
- Kōwhaiwhai are also known to make reference to 'mauri', the source of life-energy, emotions and essence of an object, place or person.