



## Touchwood celebrates 20 years of book selling



Touchwood Books has seen many changes in the New Zealand gardening scene since Peter and Diane Arthur first started business in June 1987.

The fashion then was for old roses, perennials, cottage gardens, and pale pastel colours; the books were from predominately English authors like Penelope Hobhouse, Christopher Lloyd, Margery Fish, Graham Stuart Thomas and Beth Chatto.

Today it is New Zealand natives, palms and cycads, succulents and bromeliads, with lots of hard surfaces, straight lines, water features and bright colours.

Gardens in town have become smaller as a result of subdivisions and vegetable gardening is currently popular, as people want to grow their own chemical-free food.

Peter Arthur started the business because he couldn't find the more

technical tree and gardening books he and various friends were wanting.

"I was a sheep and beef farmer at the time, and was planting masses of trees on our 240 hectare farm, 50 kms west of Hastings, on the road to Taihape. I thought I could farm by day and sell a few books by mail order, working on the kitchen table at night" he said.

"However, gardening took off and I got someone else to run the farm. Our house overflowed with books so we moved to a nearby building. At the peak of the gardening boom we had 25 agents dotted around New Zealand and opened a shop in central Auckland."

"The interest in gardening started to wane, people became more interested in food and wine, and sitting around in cafes, while they paid a professional to mow the lawns and do the weeding."

The agents and the shop were closed down but the internet had started and Touchwood, being already computerised, were one of the first New Zealand bookshops to have all their books listed on-line.

In 2003 a huge new bookshed was built, adjoining an old 2-storied horse stable, about 75 metres away from the Arthur's house. There are about 20,000 different titles, new and second hand in stock, including some for farmers and lifestyle block holders.

Touchwood is a family owned business employing two staff, Graham and Tracey Harvey, who live in the old farm homestead about 150 metres away from the bookshed. They run things while the Arthur's are away at shows like Mystery Creek and Ellerslie Flower Show.

After selling more than half a million gardening and horticultural books in the last 20 years, Touchwood know their books.

**The Touchwood Books website (<http://touchwoodbooks.co.nz/index.html>) has numerous links to the collection of book reviews on the RNZIH website ([http://www.rnzih.org.nz/Book\\_Reviews/Book\\_review\\_index.htm](http://www.rnzih.org.nz/Book_Reviews/Book_review_index.htm)). The RNZIH website currently has more than 310 reviews of gardening and horticultural books, and in turn we link to Touchwood's individual listings wherever they have a title available.**

