

# Obituaries

**Diane Rae Arthur**

**9 August 1941 – 28 April 2016**



Diane Arthur, who many of you will remember running the Touchwood Books stand at horticultural Trade Days with her husband Peter, died 28th April 2016.

She had battled bone and small cell cancer for 18 months.

When they married in 1972 Diane was a high school teacher and Peter a farmer earning extra cash sheep shearing and cutting firewood. Diane's mother, Bay, was a keen gardener and she passed this gene onto Diane, who started a large garden on the farm, 55 km west of Hastings on the Napier-Taihape Road.

She became an expert on heritage roses, planting a large number in various areas in the vicinity of the house.

They joined various horticultural groups – Heritage Roses, the Camellia Society, Rhododendron Association, Farm Forestry Association, Tree Crops and the Royal Horticultural Society in the UK, which, once a year, sent out a mouth-watering book list.

In those days importing books was a bit of a hassle – not like today. You needed to get a bank draft and then wait months for the book to come by sea freight. If the shipment was over a certain value it had to be cleared by customs. If the book wasn't what you wanted – too bad. You were virtually stuck with it.

In 1987 the Arthur's decided to set up Touchwood Books and started importing many of the good books that were not available in New Zealand bookshops, and taking them to gardening shows. People were pleased to see the books they had read about in the RHS booklist and business was brisk.

Inevitably there were plants for sale at these gardening shows, and once the Touchwood stand was set up, Diane would do the rounds, talking to the growers, finding out what was new and interesting, and buying plants that took her fancy.

This, along with a good memory, gave her an excellent plant knowledge, backed up by the huge range of books that Touchwood carried in stock and which could be referred to whenever the need arose. In 2012 the Arthur's sold Touchwood Books to Liz Legge in Levin, who has recently on-sold it to Roxy Warrington.

Diane finished up with quite a large garden which is now able to mostly look after itself. She was not a fanatic for tidiness but adopted Edna Walling's advice that a garden should always be a bit bigger than you can properly look after.

She enjoyed flamboyant plants like daturas and epiphyllums. Apart from gardening, she was a fanatical bridge player, great reader and clucky grandmother.

She is survived by Kate, Lucy and Jessica who all used to help on the Touchwood stands at various times, plus five grandchildren.

Diane had a great sense of humour. A customer asked her how to stop chooks being clucky. Diane explained her method of putting them in a possum cage trap and hoisting them high up in the air for a day or so. The customer said "Well what do the chooks think of that?" and Diane replied "I don't know – I've never asked them".

And when the ambulance came to take her to the hospice two days before she died the St John's officer asked "And how are you today Mrs Arthur?" Her reply, "Well you are here, so obviously not so great."

**Obituary compiled by Peter Arthur**

**In 2017, Touchwood Books ([www.touchwoodbooks.co.nz](http://www.touchwoodbooks.co.nz)) will have been in business for 30 years, providing horticulturists and collectors with a treasure house of new and second-hand titles.**

**We celebrated their 20th anniversary of selling books by running an article featuring them in this journal nearly 10 years ago (*New Zealand Garden Journal*, 2007, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 32). At that time, Touchwood Books was still under the ownership of Diane and Peter Arthur out of their 240 hectare farm west of Hastings.**

**And nearly 5 years ago, Diane and Peter sold their highly successful business. This is a long and proud legacy that we hope will continue into the future.**