

# Book Reviews

## New Zealand native ground cover plants: A practical guide for gardeners and landscapers

By Lawrie Metcalf and Roy Edwards

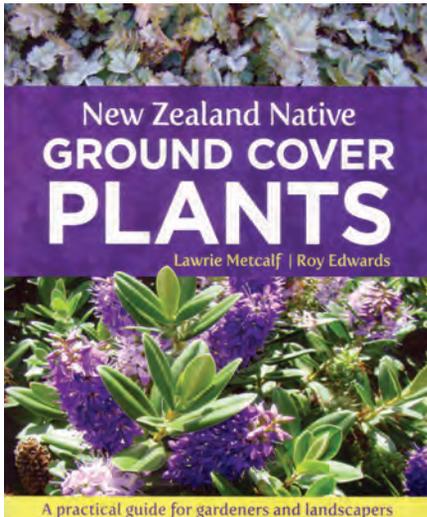
Published by Canterbury University Press, November 2014

Paperback, full colour, 112 pages, 250 x 210 mm

ISBN 978-1-927145-61-6

\$NZ34.99

Reviewed by Murray Dawson



Native plants are now a firmly established favourite of many gardeners and landscapers, and native ground covers offer many attractive and low maintenance options to fill open ground and understories.

Native ground covers are a topic that is usually only covered as part of broader New Zealand plant books, so the authors' dedicated work is a welcome addition to the horticultural literature.

I know both of the authors who are based at Lincoln, Canterbury. Both are expert and well-respected plantsmen, so I was interested when they told me a few years ago that they were combining forces to work on this book.

Lawrie Metcalf's career spans working at Duncan & Davies Nurseries in New Plymouth, Australian and UK placements, the Christchurch Botanic Gardens, and managing Invercargill's public parks and gardens. Since his

official "retirement" back in 1992, he has actively continued his writing and horticultural interests from his home in the Nelson area, and more recently, in Lincoln township. Lawrie is well-known for his native plant guides and books on the cultivation and propagation of New Zealand native plants, and has published more than 11 of these titles since 1972. In 1991 Lawrie received the Gold Veitch Memorial Medal for services to horticulture by the Royal Horticultural Society (UK)<sup>1</sup>.

Roy Edwards is a long-standing lecturer in horticulture at Lincoln University. He has extensive experience in plant use and selection for hedging and amenity purposes. Roy has written guides to the plants growing on the university grounds, including an outstanding magnolia collection that he helped establish on the campus. Roy has also contributed text and images to several books on landscaping with plants<sup>2</sup>.

The headings of each chapter and subheadings of the sections are thoughtfully arranged and provide an easy to follow order for readers.

For the purposes of the book, the authors classify ground covers as plants that are low growing and (for small gardens in particular) usually less than 30 cm tall. Their categories are:

- Carpet or mat formers (e.g., *Acaena*, the native bidibidi)
- Sprawlers (e.g., *Jovenella sinclairii*)
- Hummock formers (e.g., many of the native sedges and grasses, such as *Anemanthele lessoniana*, gossamer grass)
- Clump formers (e.g., *Phormium*, the native flax or harakeke)
- Spreaders (e.g., *Libertia peregrinans*, a native iris)
- Rosette formers (e.g., *Celmisia spectabilis*, a native mountain daisy).

These six types of ground cover span a remarkable array of plant form, colour, foliage and flowers – more than enough diversity to suit the needs of New Zealand gardeners and landscapers.

After the chapter discussing the different categories of ground covers begins a chapter on designing gardens to use them to best effect, by considering colour, line, form, and texture, then how to calculate the number of plants needed to fill a given area, and then how to determine the ideal heights for those spaces. This ensures, in the authors own words, that "At the end of the design process your garden should be functional, low maintenance and aesthetically pleasing."

The following chapter on propagation and planting out is also useful, providing guidance on how to propagate native plants through seed, spores (for ferns), and by vegetative means (through divisions and cuttings). It's very true that planning ahead and propagating your own plants can save a lot of money when it comes time to plant out your new garden area.

The next chapter deals with ground preparation, and discusses the types of weeds and how to control them by physical removal and spraying with herbicides.

Native ground covers are chosen for the book that will do well in a range of growing conditions throughout New Zealand, and there are notes on the best conditions that suit each, such as shade, full sun, dry, or damp soils. This is really handy as it allows the reader to select the best plant for the best place.

The A–Z listing (well, A–W actually, from *Acaena* to *Wahlenbergia*) of ground cover plants starts with notes about some genera, followed by their species and cultivars. Each has a few sentences that are short, useful and to the point. 59 genera are numbered, and each species or cultivar profile

<sup>1</sup> Lawrie Metcalf was profiled in an article by Melanie Kinsey; see *New Zealand Garden Journal*, 2006, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 24–25 (available at [www.rnzih.org.nz/RNZIH\\_Journal/Pages\\_24-25\\_from\\_2006\\_Vol9\\_No2.pdf](http://www.rnzih.org.nz/RNZIH_Journal/Pages_24-25_from_2006_Vol9_No2.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> *Garden Design: A New Zealand guide* and *Going Native: Making use of New Zealand native plants* – both published by Canterbury University Press.

finishes with what type of ground cover each plant is. All together, more than 140 ground covers (species, subspecies, varieties, hybrids and cultivars) are carefully selected to include in this book.

This book has a nice layout, with pictures of groundcovers at the bottom of each page, and text above. There are more than 100 photos, sourced largely from both of the author's image collections.

The authors' practical knowledge shines throughout their book – to provide just one example, they rightly regard *Astelia chathamica* 'Silver Spear' as having nothing to indicate the cultivar's distinctiveness from the typical species.

I noticed that the authors still use the botanical name *Hebe* rather than combinations in *Veronica*. This of course is their choice, and probably one of convenience, but it does now seem that *Veronica* is becoming widely accepted for our native hebes. Sometimes it's wise to follow a conservative approach to avoid potential taxonomic flip-flopping by botanists, or increasingly, by molecular systematists.

The book concludes with a glossary of terms, a concise list of specialist nurseries that sell native ground covers, and a reference list for further reading.

This book will appeal to those with an interest in growing native plants who would like to know more about the wide range of ground covers available, and how to use them to best effect.

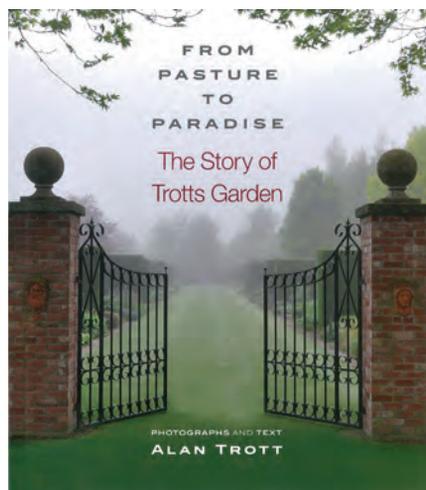
Would I recommend this book? Yes, definitely.

### **From pasture to paradise: The story of Trotts Garden**

By Alan Trott

Published by Trotts Garden Publishing, Ashburton, New Zealand, 2012

Hardback, 180 colour illustrations, 160 pages, 260 x 230 mm  
ISBN 978-0-473-21868-3  
\$NZ50.00



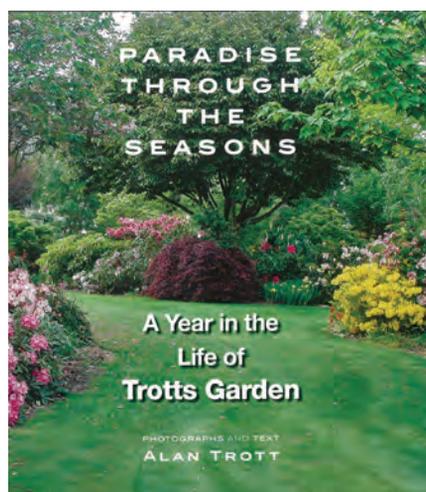
### **Paradise through the seasons: A year in the life of Trotts Garden**

By Alan Trott

Published by Trotts Garden Publishing, Ashburton, New Zealand, January 2016

Hardback, 330 colour illustrations, 288 pages, 260 x 230 mm  
ISBN 978-0-473-34256-2  
\$NZ60.00

Reviewed by Murray Dawson



It's so inspiring to see the creators of New Zealand's outstanding gardens authoring books that document their horticultural journeys and achievements. Examples include the Subtropical Garden at Landsend<sup>1</sup> in Oratia, Auckland, Ayrilies Garden<sup>2</sup> near Whitford, Auckland, Ohinetahi Garden<sup>3</sup> in Governors Bay, Banks Peninsula, and the garden at Larnach Castle<sup>4</sup>, Otago Peninsula.

So what about Trotts Garden, located near Ashburton on the Canterbury Plains? As if designing and creating a garden of international significance from scratch wasn't enough of an achievement, owner Alan Trott took all of the excellent photos, wrote text for both of his books and also self-published them, all to the highest of standards. Oh, and he also established a nursery onsite so has probably also propagated many of the plants too.

The RNZIH New Zealand Gardens Trust (NZGT) has awarded Trotts Garden with their maximum of six stars. This means that Trotts Garden provides one of New Zealand's top garden experiences, and achieves and maintains the highest levels of presentation, design and plant interest throughout the year. Six-star gardens are described as the complete package which inspire garden lovers and deliver an experience above all other gardens.

As evidenced by his achievements, Alan is obviously a multi-talented and driven individual, yet he remains modest. Alan told me that his books are not about him, but about the garden itself. While I'm sure this is true, I think that in some ways one is also a reflection of the other. Indeed, the NZGT listing ([www.gardens.org.nz/christchurch-canterbury-gardens/trotts-garden](http://www.gardens.org.nz/christchurch-canterbury-gardens/trotts-garden)) states "the garden oozes his personality and love of plants".

The first book is of fewer pages and focuses on the development of the garden, so has proportionally more text to cover this story. The second book is more pictorially-based, and takes us on a year-long photographic journey through the garden, spanning all four seasons.

<sup>1</sup> *The Subtropical Garden at Landsend: A plant collector's dream*, by Dick Endt, reviewed in *The New Zealand Garden Journal*, 2014, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ayrilies: My story, my garden*, by Beverley McConnell, reviewed in *The New Zealand Garden Journal*, 2013, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> *Ohinetahi Garden, house and art*, by Sir Miles Warren.

<sup>4</sup> *The garden at Larnach Castle: A New Zealand story*, by Margaret Barker, reviewed in *The New Zealand Garden Journal*, 2007, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 28.



**Fig. 1** 1940s photograph of the property reflecting what it looked like when purchased in 1978. Photo courtesy Trots Garden.



**Fig. 2** Garden, February 2012. Photo courtesy Trots Garden.

Both books complement each other well with little overlap in content. They are of the same width and height, which not only provides uniformity of style, but on a more practical level means that they can be shipped together easily. I cannot recommend one over the other, as both are worthy additions to the bookshelf or perhaps coffee table.

Alan's first book, *From pasture to paradise: The story of Trots Garden*, was published in 2012. This title is self-explanatory and the book describes the development of the garden, from a "4-hectare block of bare land with an old house, horse stables, very little garden and thirteen trees" (Fig. 1) to the extensive private garden it is today. Over seven chapters, the book explains how the different areas of the garden were developed. These chapters are entitled: 'The Beginning', 'The Woodland Garden', 'The Red Garden', 'The Pond and Damp Garden', 'The Formal Garden', 'The Border Garden' and 'The Brantwood Chapel'.

In the first chapter, 'The Beginning', Alan tells us that he became

interested in gardens and collecting and growing plants from an early age. He and his wife Catherine purchased their property, located on the outskirts of Ashburton, in December 1978. Getting the mortgage under control was a priority in those first few years, but work on creating the garden soon followed, starting in 1984. From a relatively blank canvas they spent more than three decades turning their garden plans into reality (Fig. 2).

Woodland gardens are an iconic garden type well suited to country estates. Not surprisingly, this was the first garden area to be planted by the Trots which today occupies two-thirds of their property (Fig. 3). Trees were planted first to provide much-needed shelter. These initially comprised of beech, oak, prunus and other trees. Birches, dogwoods, magnolias and an extensive maple collection followed. Under-plantings in the woodland garden include camellias, azaleas and an extensive collection of rhododendrons. Groundcovers complete the plantings in this area. Alan Trots's plantsmanship is revealed by his determination to "plant only the best of cultivars, not seedlings". Built

structures added to the woodland garden include a belvedere (viewing platform), dovecote (pigeon or dove house) and gazebo.

'The Red Garden' (Fig. 4) is an inspired planting that began in 2005, occupying an area 60 m long by 6 m wide. About 50 red and purple flowered and foliated selections used in this garden are detailed in this chapter. Of special note is *Berberis thunbergii* f. *atropurpurea* 'Helmond Pillar' with its unusual columnar spires and purple-red deciduous leaves. Nine of these shrubs have been planted in a square to provide a feature arrangement. Another *Berberis*, the dwarf *B.* 'Little Favourite' is used as a low-growing (30 cm tall) hedge in the front of the red garden border. To provide additional interest, Alan made two silhouettes – Adam and Eve – painted dark red, and installed them in this garden.

Water features are a major drawcard and 'The Pond and Damp Garden' chapter recounts digging out the pond from a bare paddock in 1985 and the subsequent planting of damp-loving selections. Again, the merits and qualities of the many plants chosen



**Fig. 3** The Woodland Garden. Photo courtesy Trots Garden.



**Fig. 4** The Red Garden. Photo courtesy Trots Garden.



Fig. 5 The Pond. Photo courtesy Trotts Garden.



Fig. 6 *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii* 'Silver Shadow' looking through the knot gardens to the chapel. Photo courtesy Trotts Garden.

are discussed. A few include hosta, primula, water-loving iris and other plants. Giant-leaved South American gunneras make a spectacular pool-edge statement and I was pleased to see that the species chosen at Trotts Garden is *Gunnera manicata* rather than the similar *G. tinctoria* which is now banned from sale, propagation and distribution under the National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA). The pond is kept relatively clear of aquatic plants to make the most of the reflections of the surrounding garden (Fig. 5).

The correct use of names is generally excellent in both books, but I noticed one exception in this chapter referring to "*Arum zantedeschia*" and "*Arum aethiopicum*" (p. 73) – neither of which are valid combinations. The species mentioned on that page should be *Zantedeschia aethiopicum* (the arum lily). Also, the "white waxy flowers" of this species certainly look like large flowers but are technically single bracts called spathe. Also, the "deep-gold stamens" is actually a spadix which is a specialised flower spike bearing numerous tiny flowers. The same applies for the "green and white flower" of the cultivar

*Zantedeschia* 'Green Goddess' (p. 73 & 128) – this is also a spathe rather than a flower. This has been picked up on in the second book which uses *Zantedeschia aethiopicum* as the accepted botanical name and correctly refers to "pure white spathe" (p. 277).

'The Formal Garden' was created from 1990. Specimen trees have been planted in this area. These include a regular grid of 24 Himalayan birch trees, *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii* 'Silver Shadow', notable for their pure white-bark and heralding the way to the chapel (Fig. 6). Macrocarpa hedging also provides formality in this and other garden areas.

A remarkable feature within 'The Formal Garden' is the square knot gardens – four 14th century geometric designs recreated by tightly-clipping *Buxus sempervirens* that were planted in 2003. What a labour of love it must have been to craft this intricate and dramatic living artistry (Fig. 7). I enjoyed seeing the viewing tower overlooking the knot gardens as a CAD (computer-generated) rendering in the first (2012) book (p. 104), and then as a real structure in the second

(2016) book (p. 89). This tower is essential for fully appreciating the design of the knot gardens from a height. It was built by Alan's brother Ian in October 2015 – talent seems to run deep in the Trott family.

'The Border Garden' is described as being 110 m long and 5.5 m wide with a 5 m grass border down the centre. This mainly herbaceous border is framed by 'rooms' of macrocarpa hedging. The aerial image used in the book (p. 124) shows this area perfectly (Fig. 8). As aptly summed up by Alan: "Borders are a lot of work, but when I find time and stand back to enjoy the view it makes it all worthwhile". Most of this chapter runs through the impressive list of plants chosen for the border – selections from more than 50 genera.

Notes on the species and cultivars (here and in the preceding chapters) include their growing preferences and horticultural qualities. Significantly, these notes provide inspiration and sound advice that others can follow for their own gardens. Hence, the value of this book is wider than documenting Trotts Garden.



Fig. 7 Knot Gardens. Photo courtesy Trotts Garden.



Fig. 8 The Border Garden. Photo courtesy Trotts Garden.



Fig. 9 Brantwood Chapel. Photo courtesy Trots Garden.

The final chapter describes the purchase and ambitious relocation of a church that was moved in 1999 from central Ashburton to the Trots' property on Racecourse Road. As the former Church of Christ building was no longer a church with a congregation, it was renamed as a chapel. It was called Brantwood Chapel after a country house in the Lake District of England. Now fully renovated since its move, this building has a new lease on life within Trots Garden as a venue for weddings, memorial services and functions. An architectural feature in its own right, the chapel provides a spiritual anchor and place of contemplation within the garden for those visitors that seek it (Fig. 9).

Some of the images in this first book lack captions, but that's fine as the images are there to provide more general views of the plants in each area of the garden described by the chapter in which they appear. More than 180 images appear in the first book. This first book has no index, but that's perfectly OK too as the content in each chapter is well organised.

Alan Trott's second book, *Paradise through the seasons: A year in the life*

*of Trots Garden*, was published at the start of this year (January 2016). It is dedicated to his wife Catherine, in recognition of the journey he has shared with her.

This book abundantly illustrates the garden plants and vistas from many vantage points allowing the reader to embark on a 'virtual tour' to gain an accurate impression of what it is like to visit Trots Garden throughout the year. Alan is a skilled photographer and the book contains more than 330 of his images. Like his first book, these images are lavishly reproduced in various sizes including full, half and quarter pages.

After a one-pager 'Foreword' and 'Introduction', the book has a chapter on each season, naturally enough 'Spring', 'Summer', 'Autumn' and 'Winter'. Next is a photographic exposition of Brantwood Chapel. Each of these chapters has a page or two of text, followed by ample and captioned image sets.

Alan does not have labels on his extensive range of plants, as he considers plant labels would detract from the overall appearance of his garden. However, it's obvious he

knows the identity of each and every one of the selections that he has chosen. These are comprehensively documented in the 'Directory of Plant Names' chapter which provides a valuable stock record of most plants grown in Trots Garden, with notes on the species and cultivars, including growth heights. The botanical names are recorded faithfully with correct spellings and following the rules of nomenclature.

Based on the list of plants provided in both books, there is a good selection of trees and shrubs, including *Acer* (maples, and especially *A. palmatum*), *Betula* (birches, grown for their range of bark colour and texture), *Cornus* (dogwoods, for their showy flowerlike bracts) and *Rhododendron* (a favourite for under-planting). I like the concept of growing a range of cultivars and species from the same genus, as it provides cohesive variations on a theme (rather than a jumble of all-different plants).

New Zealand native plant lovers should look elsewhere than Trots Garden. Other than a few variegated phormiums, his garden collection focusses on exotic plant selections.

This book concludes with acknowledgements and an index (as opposed to the earlier directory) of plant names.

I noticed a small spelling mistake of the word 'sensational' on the back outside cover of this second book, but as I have said, both books have been produced to a very high standard and I have spotted a greater number of typos in some works by major publishing houses.

Trots Garden is open to the public by appointment. Visit them and buy these books – I doubt that you will be disappointed by either experience.

**Both books are available from the author/publisher at [www.trots.co.nz/book.php](http://www.trots.co.nz/book.php)**