

## Fellow of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture (FRIH)

### Yvonne Ruth Baker



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Yvonne Baker (née Etherington) was raised on a beef cattle farmlet near York, UK. Like so many life-long horticulturists, from a young age Yvonne enthusiastically tended her own patch in her mother's large garden. For her 13th birthday, her father built her a greenhouse, and at 14 she started working after school and weekends at a local garden centre and nursery.

After leaving Fulford Senior School in 1998, Yvonne attended Bishop Burton College, studying for her National Diploma of Horticulture.

After completing her NDH, Yvonne started training at the Royal Horticultural Society Gardens, Wisley. She gained a Diploma in Practical Horticulture in 2002, and a Certificate in Plant Centre Management in 2003. During her time at Wisley, Yvonne received many awards recognising her proficiency, including a RHS Travel Award to California to study plants and gardens.

After finishing training at Wisley, Yvonne had several gardening, retail and nursery jobs in the UK including working at beautiful Castle Howard in their plant centre. She escaped the English winter of 2005 by travelling on sabbatical to New Zealand, for a summer working at King's Plant Barn (Forrest Hill branch, Auckland).

Fortuitously this led to her finding kiwi husband-to-be Gary Baker, who was managing the building alterations at the garden centre. She returned to England and worked at Castle Howard in 2006, during which time she applied for New Zealand residency.

Upon her return to New Zealand, Yvonne again worked for King's Plant Barn – this time at the St Luke's branch – before accepting the position of Botanical Records and Conservation Officer at the Auckland Botanic Gardens (ABG). In many ways this was a 'dream job' for Yvonne, involving managing and updating the botanic gardens' plant database, proof-reading horticultural publications and creating interpretative signage, undertaking plant identifications, coordinating and sourcing plants and new plant trials, and plant propagation and conservation work on and off site.

Yvonne provided horticultural advice and engagement with staff, visitors, volunteers, Friends of the Botanic Gardens, nurserymen, and other horticulturists. This included speaking at gardening clubs around Auckland and involvement in Botanic Gardens Australia and New Zealand – NZ (BGANZ–NZ), the International Plant Propagators' Society – New Zealand (IPPS–NZ), and the New Zealand Gardens Trust (NZGT).

In 2011, Yvonne's work at ABG was profiled in depth by *Commercial Horticulture* magazine in their April/May issue.

Yvonne made an immense contribution to ABG during her tenure, taking the botanical records database to a new level. She matured into one of the country's most knowledgeable plant experts, and her passion and expertise was a positive influence on her colleagues, especially apprentices and younger staff.

In 2014, after seven years, Yvonne reluctantly left her position with the AGB shortly after the birth of her first son. The demands of starting a new family made the lengthy commute from their home in Waitakere (in the west of Auckland) to the Gardens in Manurewa (South Auckland) impracticable at that time.

This change in home life resulted in work closer to home, as a propagation assistant but soon afterwards as the production supervisor at Container Nurseries 1988 Ltd, Whenuapai (from October 2014 until March 2017). These physically demanding roles focussed on practical nursery production.

From March 2017 to July 2019, Yvonne returned to the Auckland Botanic Gardens on a part-time basis organising, sourcing, tending and assessing plants for their outdoor trials.

Yvonne is also a freelance horticultural consultant, and has worked with the RNZIH on their plant collection register project, the NZGT on their social media needs (Facebook and Instagram), and on various other horticultural work.

Yvonne joined the RNZIH in April 2016, and from June 2017 has contributed as a member of the National Executive.

An RNZIH fellowship is awarded to "Members who have made a significant contribution to horticulture by their activities or interest in or service to horticulture".

Yvonne's outstanding and encyclopaedic knowledge of cultivated plants, her skills as a networker in horticultural circles, and her contributions to the RNZIH, NZGT and other organisations make her a most worthy new Fellow.

**Citation prepared by  
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