Book Reviews

Tony Hayter

Gardening with Hebes
By Chris and Valerie Wheeler, G.M.C. Publications, United Kingdom, 2002, ISBN 1 86108 291 6, paperback, 149 pages, 210 x 275 mm, $59.95, available from Touchwood Books.

Chris and Valerie Wheeler founded Siskin Plants, a nursery specialising in dwarf plants, in the aftermath of the Great Storm of 1987. They hold the National Collection of Dwarf Hebes. The business has recently been sold, but they will continue to hold the national collection, and sell a wide range of dwarf hebes by mail order.

The introduction to this book states that its aim is to give ideas on how to enhance the garden with hebes, and practical advice on growing and maintaining hebes. *Hebe* is a diverse genus, with a hebe for most situations in the garden. Their popularity has steadily increased over the last 20 to 30 years, which has led to an increased interest in breeding hebe hybrids, and a correspondingly large number of new introductions. Opposite the introduction there is a full-page photo of a single raceme of *Hebe* 'Nicola's Blush'. This stunning photo is the first of many. In fact, this book is full of excellent photos, beautifully produced and full of practical information useful for anyone who grows hebes.

In Chapter 1, "Origins and Characteristics", Chris and Valerie give an introduction to New Zealand and its plants, of which *Hebe* is the largest genus. They state that hebes are found also in Australia, although I think they are referring to parahebes. They then examine New Zealand's wide range of habitats, and show that hebes fit into all of these. The suitability of hebes for growing in the northern hemisphere is discussed, and is followed by notes on the breeding of new hebe hybrids. The authors describe the various forms of hebe flowers, hebe growth habits, leaves, stems, winter colour and hardiness. Again these characteristics are shown in colour photos.

In Chapter 2, "Using Hebe in the Border", the authors move into the garden. They start the chapter with two large colour photos, *Hebe* 'Midsummer Beauty' and *Hebe salicifolia*, which certainly grab your attention. They then discuss the use of hebes as an evergreen backbone to borders, especially their importance in winter, when all herbaceous plants have died down. The wide range of hebe leaf colour is important, and here the more highly coloured new growth is mentioned. The authors examine hebes in new borders, the wide variation in size and its importance, uses for low-growing hebes, and the use of hebes as a backdrop for other plants, statues or containers. The chapter ends with the authors showing how to combine hebes with other plants, and two suggested planting schemes. Both schemes are illustrated with double page, colour sketches.

Chapter 3 deals with hebes for rock gardens and raised beds. Their evergreen foliage is again used as a green background, and a contrast with herbaceous alpines. After covering the cultivation of hebes in rock gardens and raised beds, they suggest two planting schemes, both illustrated with double page colour sketches. In Chapter 4, Chris and Valerie demonstrate which hebes to use for ground cover, as well their cultivation.

In Chapter 5, the authors compose a symphony of hebes. They look at the points you should consider when planning a bed consisting of hebes alone. These include contrast of foliage, and the scale and shape of the planting. They end the chapter with examples, using tables of hebes, and in double page, annotated, colour drawings.

Chapter 6 is about hebes in containers. Container gardening is increasingly popular, with many variations possible in size and positioning. The smaller hebes are best for containers, the larger ones quickly outgrowing the space available. The authors consider the types of container available, the choice of hebes for foliage and flowering, the use of frost tender hebes, hebes in combination with other plants, and lastly hebes in sinks. These themes are demonstrated with three double-page, annotated, colour drawings.

In Chapter 7, Chris and Valerie cover all aspects of the cultivation of hebe hedges, using large, medium and small hebes. The hedges are nicely illustrated with colour photographs. Indeed, there is a full-page illustration of one of the best hebes, *Hebe rigidula*, which grows very well in my garden.

Chapter 8 covers hebes as standards, a topic on which there have been several articles in *Hebe News*. The techniques for creating standards are illustrated for *Hebe rigidula*, although larger and smaller hebes can also be grown as standards. The authors also describe topiary for hebes, i.e., growing them to a specific shape, such as a sphere, cone, or as a ball on a stem.

Chapter 9 is about the cultivation of hebes, and is one of the most useful chapters in the whole book. The authors deal with topics such the best position to plant hebes, how to plant them in the border and in a container, watering and feeding, and pruning and propagation. The chapter ends with a troubleshooting section, the effects of drought, wind scorch, frost damage, downy mildew and aphids. Again the excellent colour photos show you which problem you have, and the text tells you how to deal with it.

The last and largest chapter describes one hundred hebes, many with an accompanying photo. The authors note particularly successful plant combinations with each hebe.

Both Douglas Chalk and Graham Hutchins have written books on hebes. These have a strong botanical flavour, and are more useful to the hebe aficionado. *The International Register of Hebe Cultivars* by Lawrie Metcalf is a very useful exploration of old hebe cultivars, but is not a guide to cultivating hebes. If you wish to learn more about growing hebes, and how to use them in your garden, this is the book for you.

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John P. Adam

Gardens of Empire. Botanical Institutions of the Victorian British Empire
By Donal P. McCracken, Leicester University Press, London and Washington, 1997, 242 pages.

The Origin of Plants. The People and Plants that have Shaped Britain's Garden History since the year 1,000
By Maggie Campbell-Culver. Headline Book Publishing, 2001, 260 pages.

Sharing a common theme, both of these books have been published about the global links of plant trading between Britain and its former colonies, such as the Americas and Asia. Although the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew lay at the core of this Empire, it is not overly represented in the McCracken book. New Zealand is quoted briefly in both books. Readers might be critical of the small content that relates to New Zealand.

Donal McCracken's focus is on the reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1902), while Campbell-Culver's book describes a 1,000-year time frame. McCracken, a historian from Natal, South Africa, analyses some 130 British Empire botanic gardens, including Asian, African and American gardens. This hard-bound book has only black and white photographs (none of the Pacific or Australasia) and numerous tables. McCracken allocates one page of text to New Zealand, where he records only five "Victorian Botanic gardens": Napier, New Plymouth, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. He boldly, yet wrongly, states "There were no Botanic gardens at Auckland... although there was a park ranger for its public domain". The Parliamentary Government, which first met in Auckland, had created a botanic garden in the Auckland Domain from the mid-1850s.

Maggie Campbell-Culver, who is a gardener and garden historian, has produced a beautifully colour-illustrated book. She documents that in 1772 the first plants imported to Britain from New Zealand were manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*) and kowhai (*Sophora tetraptera*) (p.180), and that the first listed imports for the 18th Century were Astelia nervosa in 1803 (p.215). But, as with McCracken, it is Campbell-Culver's doubtful claim that "it was not until 1863 that there was any attempt to develop Botanic gardens". She then lists only three gardens: Christchurch, Dunedin and Wellington! Her sources include McCracken, whom she quotes in the "Select Bibliography."

The inaccuracies revealed in these books raise a key issue, namely: How does one correct the unfamiliarity of an international audience with New Zealand's garden and botanical history?

In the course of my own research I have explored the extent to which New Zealand's primary botanical history was attached to the Australian colonies. Plants were being traded freely across the Tasman Sea and beyond from the 1820s. The term "native productions" was an economic term used to classify a whole range of commodities to be traded, including New Zealand plants. For example, the seed of some native trees, such as the kowhai (*Sophora* spp.), were traded, as was the bark of this tree as a dye (*The New Zealander*, 14 February 1846. p.1).

Auckland was selected as the permanent new capital of New Zealand in 1840, and by May 1843 the merchant classes had formed a public Agricultural and Horticultural Society that raised monies to construct a new market building. These businesses and their political and social processes happened within all other organised settlements, such as at Nelson and Wellington, where public gardens were initially attached to these institutions during the first decades of the juvenile settlements. Like Sydney, Auckland had two public gardens. One surrounded the state house of the Governor (patron of the energetic Agricultural & Horticultural Society), and the other, in the nearby Government Domain, functioned at its physical centre (and political centre where a new Governors house was planned but never built) as a public Botanic Garden from the mid-1850s. The Auckland Provincial Government (1854-1876) attempted unsuccessfully to take control of the Crown's "Auckland Domain Botanic Garden," functioning in part as a pleasure garden, and also as an acclimatising institution under the patronage of the Crown's Public Domain Board created in 1861 by the first New Zealand Prime Minister, Edward Stafford. A private acclimatisation society was also established in this public park in 1867. Entry was by "user pays", and competed with the Crown's own gardens that remained freely accessible (written into leases for the site after 1867) to the public, even when the land was leased to nurserymen and Chinese market gardeners decades later.

Some previously published research on Auckland gardens, including public ones, by Dr Robert Cooper in the 1970s, did not access the Government archives held in Wellington since the capital had moved there in 1864. Cooper likewise did not consult the detailed letter and minute books of the Auckland Domain Board that cover the period from 1860 to 1893 (held by Auckland City Archives). These primary sources document in considerable detail the close affiliation between newly established colonial museums (Auckland since 1852), private local and national businesses, and the Crown's significant command of international plant commodities being imported and exported regionally (to places such as New Plymouth and Napier), and to and from the Auckland Government Gardens.

Communication and exchange of plants and plant knowledge occurred between all of New Zealand's public gardens (Invercargill, Dunedin, Timaru, Christchurch, Nelson, Wellington, New Plymouth, Napier, Auckland, Whangarei and others), especially up to the time the Government subsidies on plant introduction (practiced through 1860s–1870s) were under threat during the 1880s. A State Forestry Department would support newly created tourism parks in Queenstown, Hanmer Springs, Te Aroha and Rotorua, from the 1880s to well past mid 20th Century. Scientific plant collections were gathered in some of these places.

As with general plant exchanges, to understand the special character of the evolving 19th Century New Zealand botanic garden, one has to consider the processes happening across the Tasman. The state of Victoria saw the creation under Baron von Mueller's direction of a whole series of Botanic Gardens in small and large towns across the state, in parallel to what occurred here from the 1850s onward. Social and aesthetic arts combined with scientific knowledge.

McCracken's and Campbell-Culver's inaccuracies build on earlier research publications that have been limited by the scope and/or veracity of their subject

matter. The long out of print William Hale's (1955) *Pioneer Nurserymen of New Zealand* is one such early example that documents a dated and rather narrow list of gardeners. All of Auckland's first private and public gardeners are missing, including some of the earliest, such as D. F. Carnegie, Thomas Cleghorn, John Lynch, John Chalmers, Andrew and William Goldie, Charles Walter Scott Purdie, Frederick Forrest, William Wells, John de Vinci Louch, Thomas Edward Pearson and Fred Tschopp. Women gardeners and florists, Maori gardeners (T. Te Kowhai, A. Warkiri and M. T. Arapita), and Chinese market gardeners were also overlooked by Hale and others.

Similarly, British author Ray Desmond's 1994 edition of *Dictionary of British and Irish Botanists and Horticulturists*, in documenting the biographical and bibliographical details of British born gardeners and foresters, fails to consider seriously those landscape gardeners and foresters who were born in Britain and who travelled to the Australian and New Zealand colonies.

This international lack of knowledge about the activities on the Colonial periphery has been answered to some extent by the pioneer environmental historian Dr Richard Grove, who has written several significant books, such as *Green Imperialism* about the activities of gardeners and foresters practicing on the periphery of the British Empire. Lincoln College researcher Charlie Challenger did publish an article about Canterbury nurserymen in the British journal *Garden History*, as did Aucklander Dr Robert Cooper about some Auckland gardens and gardeners.

Garden historians should verify the material they examine. Primary and secondary discourses must be understood in terms of why they were written. For example, the literature on the history and contemporary status of New Zealand's Botanic Gardens and parks written by Dunedin horticulturist David Tannock in the mid 20th Century, is a mine-field of half facts (about the history of New Zealand's botanic gardens), and opinions that were mostly politically motivated, following a controversial yet unsuccessful attempt to establish a State funded National Botanic Garden.

McCracken concludes (p.210) about the new social and educational role of botanic gardens today permeating from the "green movement" in the 1990s. It is claimed naively that there was little concern for the "environment" in the preceding "popularist movements" of the past 90 years "new varieties of ideologically-based politics", after the collapse of the Empire (based on his African experience?). Yet if McCracken had analysed the past ninety years of botanic garden history for New Zealand, including that for the Auckland Province, he would have found the making of a series of new provincial botanical gardens, all funded by loans and rates under the control of local urban Councils, in Dunedin and Christchurch on their existing Colonial botanic gardens; in Wellington, at the unique "Otari Native Plant Museum" (now called a botanic garden) created by the scientific and political skills of Dr Leonard Cockayne; and in the upper North Island, at a botanical garden developed across at least one third of the 65 hectare Auckland Domain by Auckland City Council and a team of botanists and horticulturists from the late 1920s to the 1950s. And all places were teaching people about their environment!

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