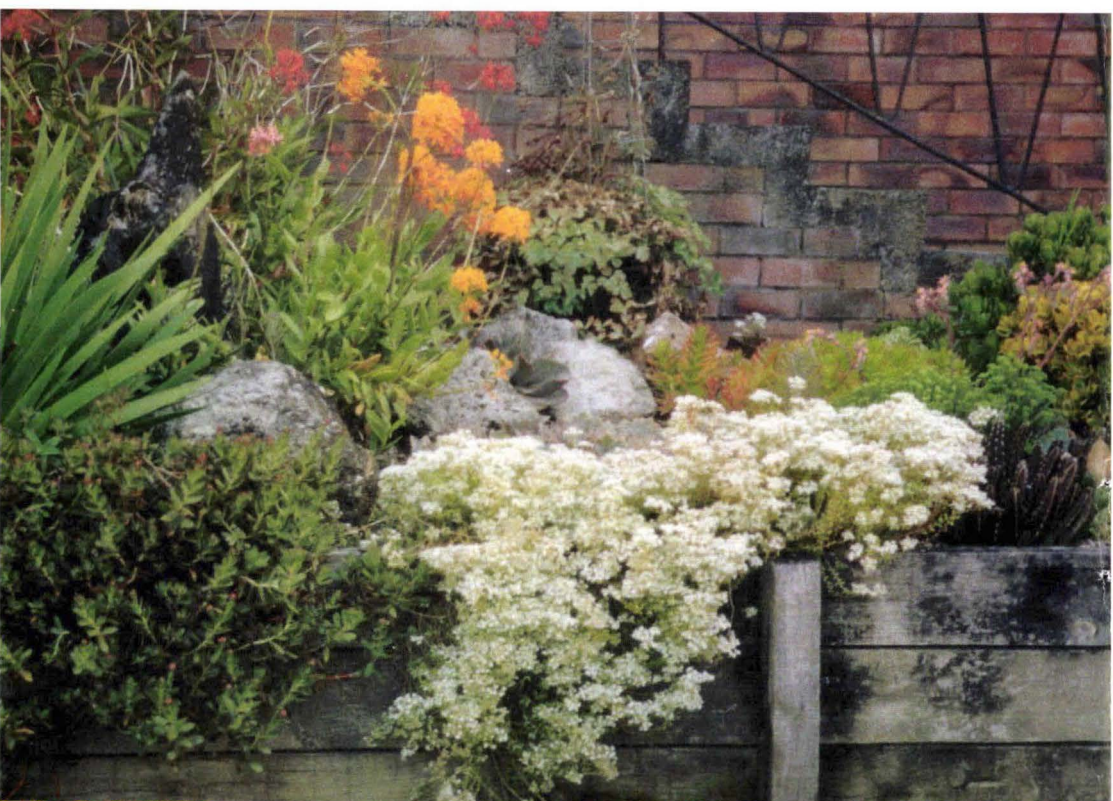




Autumn 2004

SUBTROPICALS



SUBTROPICALS

is a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on the identification, growth requirements and sourcing of native and exotic subtropical plants (and tropicals) suitable for gardens in the milder parts of New Zealand.

AUTUMN 2004

Volume 3 Number 1

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**WINTER ISSUE
COPY DEADLINE**

All copy must be received by the 30TH April 2004

Weather!

January was warm and fine but February... Much of Northland needed rain early in the month, the Auckland area was wet, windy and cool (the worst in memory) and as for the lower North Island, the deluges spelt disaster for many.

However, in some places, the tropicals were grateful for all that rain (despite the cool temperatures). We often forget that many of these plants come from summer rainfall habitats where they receive daily moisture.

March temperatures already feel more like winter than autumn and the plants know it. Winter flowering *Pyrostegia venusta* has been producing new flowerheads for a few weeks and will obviously be early this year. After two cool winters in a row, a third is not welcome.

The major events for the society this year are the 2004 Conference, the sale of subtropical plants and the exhibition of contemporary outdoor sculpture. All are being held on the last weekend in June at the ASB Stadium in Kohimarama. Details are on pages 21 and 22.

Included with your magazine is the application form for the 2004 Conference. I hope that the conference will turn out to be as enjoyable and successful as the first one.

Also included in this issue is the index compiled by Rosemary Steele. To make using it easier, we have combined both the 2002 and 2003 indexes. Hope you find it useful.

Marjorie Lowe
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SUBTROPICALS

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FRONT COVER STORY

REINVENTING A DAMP AND GLOOMY SPACE INTO A SUNNY, DRY PLACE FOR SUCCULENTS

Grant Bayley

Over the years, the north facing garden (5m x 2.5m) bordering the front entry stairs had become an overgrown jungle. The remains of an attempted rose garden (three roses) by a flatmate long since departed was shaded by a multi-branched, six metre *Buddleia davidii* (now declared a noxious weed) seeding everywhere. Also in this small area were a few *Leptospermum ericoides* (Kanuka) four metres high and a *Carica pubescens* (Mountain Pawpaw) bought from the Sunday markets as a 15cm high seedling. Unlike tropical pawpaw where the flesh is eaten, with mountain pawpaw the sweet, fleshy seeds are the edible parts.

The understorey plants consisted of the noxious weeds *Nephrolepis cordifolia* (Ladder Fern), Asparagus Fern and ivy, plus some spring flowering bulbs and a few poorly growing orchids destroyed by snails. To complete the scene, a few rocks and a large stump burnt black.

Despite the sunny position, the effect was of a shadowy area that grew slime and moss. The shade cast on the deck above made the surface slippery at times and was dangerous to walk on (I skidded and fell a few times). It was pretty messy looking and uninviting – an older house overgrown by plants. Things had to change!

I dug out the stumps after the buddleia and the kanuka were felled and, apart from the mountain pawpaw, cleared out all the understorey plants and weeds. The only other things kept were the rocks and the fire-blackened tree stump.

Front cover:

Looking along the length of the retained plant bed, with *Carica pubescens* silhouetted against the white garage wall. A healthy, rapidly growing clump of the Poor Knights Lily (see 2/1 – 34,35) is a few years away from flowering.

Epidendrums in flower include red, orange, pink, puce and almost white (see 2/1 – 18,20) The cascading cream flowers belong to *Sedum nudum*, which blooms spectacularly in late January – early February for about ten days. It dies back after flowering but then grows rapidly to form mats of brilliant emerald green succulent vegetation. Weathered and lichenized rocks punctuate the planting.

Photos: Grant Bayley

The cleared ground was covered with chipped tree and shrub material to help suppress any latent weeds and, now that the area was fully exposed to the sun, to retain moisture. The plant bed was already retained by a 90cm high timber wall, level with the landing that breaks the entry stairs into two sections.

With this exposure, I now had a great area to plant succulents and a few other plants not usually thought of as succulents (*Xeronema callistemon* and epidendrums) plus those odd bits and pieces that one always seems to have around.

I gave the plants plenty of room to grow – well I thought so at the time – and my cat loved the warm sheltered area to sunbathe in. A few plants were purchased, but many were throw-outs from friends.

The brick walls behind the garden absorb heat during the day and release it slowly at night. This probably helps to reduce frosts to a very few light ones, observed coating the mulch.

The succulent plantings include *Bryophyllum tubiflora* (*Kalanchoe tubiflora*), *Crassula coccinea*, a plant that is red but goes green for part of the year, or perhaps it is green and goes red (usually in autumn) for part of the year! *Graptoveria paraguayense*, a succulent with a grey rosette and yellow flowers that seem to bloom over a long period and *Stapelia grandiflora* (see 2/2 – 16,17).

Orchids, mostly *Dendrobium kingianum* hybrids, are tucked in everywhere and a square wooden planter contains epicacti. Within a short time, the planting was lush and full, a contrast to the more usual minimalist approach.

Inside front cover:

Top:

Brick walls line the stairs to the front door making a pleasant background to the planting. The green plant to the left, spilling down the front of the timber wall, is *Crassula pubescens* about to come into flower. While not as showy as the *Sedum nudum* to the right, it is very attractive with red outer petals that enclose white flowers.

Bottom left:

An unidentified aeonium (species/cultivar?) with red edges to the rosette. This will soon have a bright yellow inflorescence. New plants form on the lower stem.

Bottom right:

Three plants of *Crassula ovata* grouped together. Each was supposed to be a different cultivar, but instead there is the plain green species plus two 'Hummel's Sunset' cultivars.

HOW MANY BENDY BANANAS CAN A BANANA-BENDER BEND?

John Prince

The answer may be fewer than you might think! Bearing in mind that Queenslanders, particularly around State of Origin game time, are often referred to as 'Banana-benders'. I thought I'd pass on a couple of salient facts for those of you who like growing bananas here in northern New Zealand and who probably think you'd be a lot better off over there.

Over the years, I had read several vague references to Queensland laws being quite restrictive as to how many plants you can have as a home owner in the Sunshine State, but I hadn't known the details, and even wondered if it could really be true. The latest (March-April) club notes from the Subtropical Fruit Club of Queensland make mention of a Department of Primary Industries (DPI) notice on their website late last year. This notice reminded both nursery owners and home growers in southern Queensland that people who buy or trade in banana plants have to get prior approval of each sale from the DPI inspectors. The potential fine for ignoring this runs up to AU\$75,000 00(!). Getting the approval is free. It is given if the parent plants are disease free, AND are one of the varieties that people are allowed to grow.

In other words, you can't grow just what you want to in your backyard. The sort of collections that some of us have here, including ours at Nestlebrae Exotics of over fifty species and cultivars, would be impossible there. They might have the climate, but in other ways they are **much** more restricted than we are here in New Zealand. There are only two officially sanctioned nursery sources in southern Queensland and the one that is in Brisbane sells only one (!) variety (Australian Lady Finger) for AU\$16.95 per plant. There is a total of just seven varieties that you can legally grow there (five of which we have here at Nestlebrae Exotics as it happens). Goldfinger is one of them but, as the president of the Subtropical Fruit Club of Queensland plaintively asked, 'Does anyone know where Goldfinger can be purchased? As far as I know it is restricted to commercial growers.'

The permitted varieties are all tall growing and the idea is that they will be easier for residential inspectors to spot if they are infected with Banana Bunchy Top Virus. Further, none of the permitted ones is a Cavendish type, as these don't show the symptoms as clearly.

The grass, or in this case the herbaceous plants, isn't always greener in Oz!

A PALM WITH GRACE – *Howea forsteriana*

Kevin Johnston

(Kentia Palm)

I've been passionate about palms for many years, trying the new species being discovered from the far-reaching parts of the globe. Like some, I ignored a palm that has been growing in New Zealand from before the turn of the last century. I guess it was all too easy growing something that was already here, compared with the exotic beauties that were sometimes a challenge to obtain and, for that matter, grow in our climate. I always thought the humble Kentia was very beautiful, but I have come to appreciate this palm more and more as time has passed. The Kentia is a very graceful palm: the deep green fronds arch outward and the leaflets hang softly, giving an exotic look that rivals any of its more tropical cousins.

The Kentia is slow to medium growing as far as palms go. It grows at about half the speed of a Bangalow (*Archontophoenix cunninghamii*) and occupies less space. It is one of the most wind tolerant palms there is, the soft leathery fronds bending to allow the ravages of the wind through, without suffering any damage whatsoever.

Kentia palms are slow to germinate and take some years to reach a landscape grade of plant. They will grow on any soil type except a bog. Old fronds fall away freely as the palms grow, therefore there is no requirement for pruning. Kentias also enjoy plenty of tucker for strong growth. Not surprisingly, coming from the shoreline of an island, they are quite salt tolerant and will endure a light frost.

Of the genus *Howea*, there are only two species – *forsteriana* (Kentia) and *belmoreana* (Curly Palm). The latter is much more uncommon and grows at half the rate. Both are endemic to Lord Howe Island and grow at sea level. They are not from Norfolk Island, as some may believe, but are grown there for seed production, mainly for the European market.

The Kentia is widely available, both for houseplants and the outdoors, so when purchasing your plant make sure you are buying one that will suit your environment. Contrary to belief, Kentia will grow in full sun from an early age, but plants grown in shade or under cover will not adjust well to their newfound position in the sun. Plants are available from specialist growers and some garden centres. Plants grown in full sun will have a much squatter appearance than the stretched alternative.

If I were to count my favourite palms on one hand, Kentia would be included so, if you're looking for a well-behaved and beautiful palm for that prime spot by the pool or front entrance, consider the Kentia.

● Kevin Johnston took the photograph opposite of a group of *Howea forsteriana* at Albany Heights on the North Shore after recent gale-force winds struck the area. The palms showed no damage from the storm. The site is regularly exposed to wind.





SOME INTERESTING HIBISCUS

Russell Fransham

Hibiscus are such blatant, tarty things and seem to go in and out of fashion so often, but I love them anyway. I guess I'm just that sort of boy. But there are a few tricks worth knowing about how to keep them looking good.

Firstly, they **must** have loose friable soil with lots of air in it to get them through winter without root-rot. Clay is only OK if it is well worked up as if you were planting lettuces or carrots. A foliar spray of Foli-R-Fos in autumn always helps ward off the dreaded rot.

Secondly, just like roses, they need hard pruning in late winter, say July or August. They also need a hefty feed of sheep or chicken manure at this time and again about Christmas time. Remember that flowers only grow on new growth, so the more old growth you cut off the more flowers you'll get. Just don't leave it too late in spring, as you'll delay the onset of flowering.

Of course they vary hugely in size and hardiness so some are much more clay tolerant than others.

Of particular interest are a number of the species Hibiscus. Here are a few of my current favourites.

Hibiscus schizopetalus is a vigorous African species with tiny delicate dangly flowers and the petals are so divided that they look like orange lace. This is also called the 'Coral Hibiscus' and the 'Spider Hibiscus'. While fast growing and tall, this one is also quite frost-tender and benefits from severe pruning every year or two.

H. arnottianus (sold as **Wilder's White**) is from Hawaii with lightly fragrant white flowers with a red stigma. This one is a small hardy coastal tree with rounded leathery leaves, often red-margined. The flowers start in February and tend to appear across the top of the tree, often too high up to be seen well.

And if you've ever sat under the trees on the beach in Bali, you probably sat under ***Hibiscus tiliaceus*** (The Coast Hibiscus), which is actually native throughout the tropics in coastal areas. It also grows in brackish swamps on the edge of estuaries such as Pearl Harbour and the

Clockwise from top left

Hibiscus schizopetalus*, *H. tiliaceus*, *H. arnottianus* (Wilder's White), *H. Psyche*, *H. Tango*, *H. Lady Cilento

Photos: Russell Fransham

mangrove forests of the Daintree River. It has heart-shaped leaves and lemon-yellow trumpet-shaped flowers with a dark maroon eye, the flowers turning orange before they fall. This is a small shapely tree to 5m in New Zealand, but it reaches 25 metres in the tropics. In Samoa it is known as 'Whau', probably because of the similarity to the unrelated New Zealand species, and the lightness of the wood, which is widely used for carving. In the Daintree River area, it grows right in the water with long beards of white roots from the submerged branches trailing in the current.

Of the hybrids, perhaps my favourite hibiscus is **Psyche**, the dangly scarlet flower worn in people's hair throughout the Pacific. It is the most widely planted ornamental hibiscus in the world and I'm not even sure that it's a hybrid. I suspect that it could be the original *H. rosa-sinensis*, but its origins are lost in antiquity. The flowers are exquisitely sculptured, with serrated, recurved petals of the most intense luminous red. In northern New Zealand it flowers all year long and is very vigorous, even tolerating pretty hard clay.

Clearly related to Psyche is **Swan Lake** (also known as Little Angel), which is tiny, dainty and purest white, flowering in great profusion and quickly growing very tall. Amongst this dazzling virtuoso display, random branches appear that produce pink flowers which are identical in every other way. Cuttings grown from these branches (sold separately as **Fantasia**) eventually sport white flowers on some branches. Most odd, but rather lovely. In Bali I have seen **Fantasia** growing two storeys high. They also are very successful as tall standards. The strongly vertical growth needs hard pruning to maintain the floriferous youthful look.

A gaudy dazzler that is almost too much, even for me, is the Australian hybrid **Lady Cilento**. Vigorous and hardy, she/it has waxy ruffled orange petals splashed with white and gold and a cerise eye. A startling sight among the more refined and elegant folk I've mentioned here, but the louder classes do add a touch of liveliness to any neighbourhood.

Finally, the aptly named **Tango** is a classy late-bloomer with a tendency to legginess without stern pruning. In summer, the huge flat flowers are a dark rust-orange with a crimson eye but, as the nights get cooler in autumn, they become an extraordinary metallic bronze and will last for up to three days.

Keeping hibiscus happy in our heavier soils can be difficult. A useful strategy is to form a raised bed by building up loose sandy soil on top of the clay. Large boulders and concrete or rock paving close against hibiscus store a lot of heat and keep the roots warmer. Doing this has allowed me to grow frangipani outside in clay, so should work well with hibiscus.

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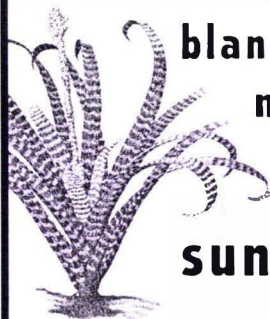
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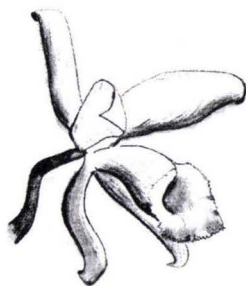
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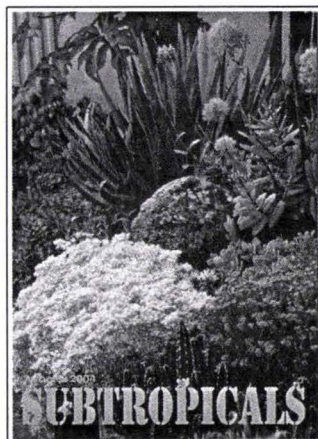
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HEROIC GARDENS FESTIVAL

Geoffrey Marshall & John Hayward

As with previous years, this festival offers the most interesting selection of gardens to visit, in numbers that one can reasonably manage to cover over an energetic two days. The weekend before the festival, I visited Geoffrey and John, hoping to get some photographs before the millions descended upon them. Alas, the weather was overcast and showery and I was finally rained out. Most of my photos reflected the dreary February weather and did not record the full beauty of the interesting and unusual plantings.

Shifting from an old Mt. Eden house to a new (to their own design) Mt. Eden house has also meant having to create a new garden. Fortunately the new site included a massive pohutukawa on the western side, giving immediate scale to the two-storey dwelling. Another benefit was being able to bring mature plants from their previous garden – not many visitors would have realised unless told that what they were viewing was a mere eighteen months old.

Entering the garden through a solid door in a high wall, one is immediately in a semi-enclosed area with a heavily planted, raised area. The planting here includes the loveliest *Strobilanthes dyerianus* (Persian Shield) I have seen – brilliant rose-purple markings on the leaves with not a caterpillar hole in sight! Below it, a young *Medinilla myriantha* with inflorescences forming that will have colourful pink to magenta berries over the autumn and winter. Both these plants really appreciate moisture, especially summer water, so should be very happy this year.

Other plants in this area include *Begonias* – Rex, rhizomatous and shrub, *Calatheas*, *Chamaedorea plumosa*, *Cordyline* (New Caledonia), *Dracaena marginata*, *Ficus dammaropsis*, *Gardenia comuta*, *Impatiens Velvatea*, *Peperomias*, *Porphyrocoma pohliana*, *Posoqueria latifolia*, *Rhodoleia*, *Tradescantias* (dark purple and a variegated pale pink), orchids, *Vireya* rhododendrons and much more (some recognisable but previously only seen in photographs).

Around the corner of the house, the north facing-garden opens up into a more formal area. The partly covered terrace (for outdoor dining and entertaining) leads on to a lawn enclosed by low box hedges. Beyond these hedges, the garden is again heavily planted including old favourites like lilies, the odd rose and bright pentas. A group of *Lobelia abadarica* is planted geometrically with a groundcover of copper-brown iresine beneath. Under a tree canopy and just behind the hedge, a Terry Stringer sculpture dominates. Continuing the path around the house towards the western side, subtropical plants take over.

Three steps down from the terrace and on the wide path is a large, jade-green glazed pot that holds a white waterlily. Stunning in its simplicity, it is backgrounded by tall *Farfugium japonicum* 'Crispata' (see

2/4 -42,43). *Bergenias* edge the path and aroids of many kinds, including *Anthurium scherzerianum* in flower, calatheas, palms and gingers extend to the boundary.

The canopy of the old pohutukawa occupies most of the west-facing garden, but its height leaves plenty of room for intensive underplanting. The trunk and branches are bedecked with bromeliads, orchids, ferns and small climbing plants. The northwest boundary is again heavily planted with *Heliconia subulata*, *Brugmansia*, *Fuchsia* species, *Strelitzia reginae*, *Philodendron*, *Scadoxus multiflorus* ssp. *katherinae* and *S. puniceus*, *Gloriosa superba*, coleus, palms and many other species.

The total ground area is not great although these days it would be considered rather generous for a city townhouse. Because of the restful feel of the more formal areas and the intensity of the planting elsewhere, the garden appears much larger than it is in fact.

If you missed seeing this garden at this year's festival, make sure that you don't do so when it is next open. This is a garden that will continue to excite, both visually and in its use of unusual subtropical plants, many of which were thought to be too tender for our climate.

Text & photos: Marjorie Lowe

Gloriosa superba

Climbing Lily

From tropical Africa, India, Sri Lanka and Asia, this is a genus with a single extremely variable species. Because it is a winter dormant tuberous perennial, it can be grown in much cooler climates than its native habitats.

A small climber to two metres, it has tendrils on the leaves and will wind through other plants, clinging as it goes. Because the tubers tend to work downwards, *Gloriosa superba* is a good subject for a large, fairly shallow pot.

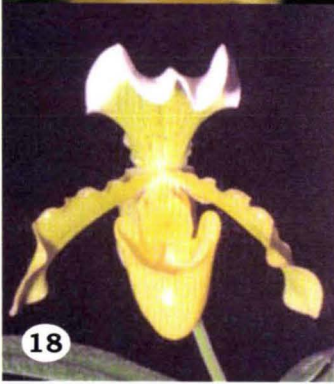
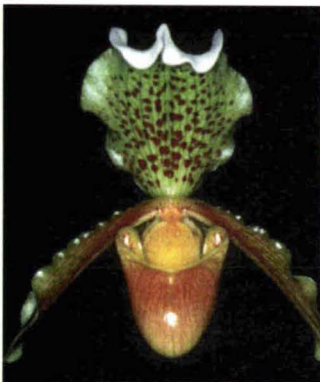
Fertile, well-drained soil and full to part sun will ensure healthy growth. Planting under winter growing evergreen shrubs will help to prevent the tubers from rotting in winter. It may be a good coastal plant as it is very salt resistant. All parts of this plant are poisonous.

The flowers are long lasting, colourful and exotic looking, making them very useful in floral arrangements.

Top: *Gloriosa superba* (possibly 'Rothschildiana') scrambling through shrubs.

Bottom: A large ceramic pot used as a water feature. The large glossy round leaves (top left) are *Ligularia reniformis*, the red flowers belong to a young *Stromanthe sanguinea* (1/4-10,11), and from bottom right, *Farfugium japonicum* 'Aureo-maculata', *Begonia* (possibly 'Bunchii'), a pot of *Sarracenias* with another plunged into the water.





PAPHIOPEDILUMS

Slipper Orchids

-the cool growing, winter flowering ones.

Keith Goodwin

This group of plants originates from the foothills of the Himalayas, northeast India, where winters are cool and clear, and summers are wet, humid, cloudy and warm. The temperatures range between 4°C and 20°C in winter and between 18°C and 28°C in summer – in other words not too far from the temperatures in the frost-free parts of New Zealand.

The species in this group are *P. fairrieanum*, *P. venustum*, *P. insigne*, *P. villosum*, *P. spicerianum* and the spring flowering *P. hirsutissimum*. Although these species grow in the same area as each other, the shape, colour and patterns of the flowers are very diverse, so that one is not merely a variation of another.

The requirements for these plants are shade (particularly over the summer months), excellent drainage, light moisture at the roots and small amounts of fertiliser. Pine bark is an excellent medium to grow them in. These orchids are terrestrial plants with no bulb or back-up water storage mechanism, so there is certainly no tolerance for exposure to hot sun or arid situations. A place with early morning sun, dappled light (as under a tree), and moist airiness would be ideal. Also, in winter there needs to be a reasonable amount of light, as under deciduous trees and shrubs, rather than the plants remaining cold and wet.

They have few pests, and in a garden situation, slugs and snails would be the main threat. Although in their natural habitat winters are dry, these plants will accept our moister conditions, provided drainage is excellent and the climate is mild. Certainly, the plants of *P. insigne* I have

Top row – left to right

***Paphiopedilum insigne*, *P. spicerianum*, *P. fairrieanum* (short, upright leaves)**

Middle:

***Paphiopedilum insigne* var. *sanderiae* – a mass display in June. A robust grower and reliable flowerer.**

Bottom row: left to right

***Paphiopedilum insigne* var. *sanderiae*, *P. venustum* (mottled leaves, flowers boldly spotted), *P. villosum* var. *annamense* (very colourful, from China)**

Photos: Keith Goodwin

seen outside in the Auckland area were thriving, although exposed to the elements over winter months.

Being at Lake Tarawera, 300 metres above sea level, our climate is not quite frost-free, and temperatures are generally lower than coastal areas. However, in an unheated greenhouse, the required temperatures for these plants are virtually identical to nature and the amount of water received is controlled.

All of these plants are regarded as endangered species due to commercial pressures - from the collecting of wild populations and the destruction of habitat. This means that plants require to be sourced from propagated stock as no international trade in wild plants is permitted.

Fortunately, most are readily available from paphiopedilum specialists within New Zealand.

WHAT'S ON

April 3rd, 4th

ANNUAL PALM & CYCAD SHOW & SALE

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CONFERENCE 2004

This year we hope to build on the success of our first conference held last year at the Freemans Bay Community Centre.

As this hall proved to be too small for the sale and display day and a little generous for conference requirements, the venue is now the ASB Stadium in Kohimarama, next to Selwyn College. Now the reverse is true – the stadium is very expansive and the conference space is adequate but not over generous. This means that we may have to limit the numbers of members wishing to attend.

In order to make the best economic use of the venue, the conference will be held on Saturday, 26TH June from 2:45pm onwards. There will be six speakers on topics very different from last year, a general question and answer session and, to wind up the day, an auction of donated plants conducted again by Brian Timms and Kelly Omeara. This was an enormous success last year – hilarious at times and great fun because everyone joined in.

Afternoon tea/coffee will be served as a break between talks. By popular choice there will be pre-dinner drinks to enable everyone to socialise. We have been fortunate to secure the conference kitchen, which means a great improvement in cooking facilities and more space in which to spread out and enjoy dinner. Rosemary Steele is again doing the catering and will be providing some interesting and nourishing fare.

There is plenty of parking and the space is well heated (very necessary on a cold(?) winter's day. This is a great chance to meet other members and to swap experiences and plant gossip. Our membership includes many highly specialised horticulturists whose collective knowledge is formidable.

The cost is the same as last year - \$35.00 per person if paid before 30TH April and \$45.00 per person if paid 1ST May onwards. Afternoon tea/coffee and pre-dinner drinks are included. Dinner is \$20.00 per head.

An enrolment form has been included with this issue – early booking will not only save money, it will ensure you a place and help us to make all the necessary arrangements.

The winter issue will include a list of the speakers and their respective subjects. If you have any ideas that would improve the conference please let us know and we will do our best to carry them out. The plant auction is to raise funds for the society so, if you have a plant of interest (large, rare, dependable, tough or just a good doer) please bring it along and Brian Timms will do the rest.

2004 - SALE OF SUBTROPICAL PLANTS AND EXHIBITION OF OUTDOOR SCULPTURE

With the move to the ASB Stadium, the society has the chance to establish an event that could become an essential part of the Auckland scene, not just for the gardening fraternity.

Thirteen hundred square metres (three basketball courts) give us not only ample space for the display and sale of subtropical plants, but the opportunity to showcase contemporary garden sculpture of a high standard. The sculpture exhibition is being organised by one of our members, Deborah White of Whitespace Gallery.

The large and attractive foyer is being turned into a café for the benefit of both patrons and sellers. Rosemary Steele has agreed to do the catering again so home baked goodies are on the menu.

Other features that we hope will be welcomed are:

Eftpos – An eftpos outlet will be provided within the foyer space.

Plant Crêche – When your arms are full of purchases, you can take them to the plant crêche, check them in for free and then go back and buy some more. The crêche has external doors so, when you want to go home, you can back your vehicle to the door and load straight in (very important if it is raining).

Information Booth & Umbrella Crêche – Somewhere to stash that wet umbrella - of course it could be a fine day!

Parking - With three hundred and sixty carparking spaces, the ASB Stadium is an enormous improvement on other available venues.

The show is being held on Saturday and Sunday, 26TH & 27TH June from 9am to 2pm. (Set-up time for sellers is Friday evening)

Admission is a \$5.00 raffle ticket, with children free.

Running a show this size means that lots of helpers are needed – for Friday night, Saturday or Sunday. Finishing by 2pm on the Sunday means that members who have travelled some distance might be home before dark.

● **If you have plants to sell and would be interested in having a stand, please fill in the form included and you will be sent the relevant details.**

● **If you would like to help in any way, for whatever time you have available, please let us know as soon as possible – time has a habit of slipping away. Ph/fax (09) 376-6874 marlowe@subtropicals.co.nz**

AERIAL LAYERING

Robin Booth

I have had questions about layering, as difficulty was being experienced in getting cuttings to grow from a particular plant.

Aerial layering is a method of taking cuttings without initially cutting off the branch. It is a good way of being able to propagate many hard-to-root-from-cutting plants. To do the job you will need a sharp knife, some moist sphagnum moss or potting mix, some sheet plastic and string for tying.

When the plant you want to propagate is in growth, select a healthy branch and, about 30cm from the tip, strip off a patch of leaves. With the knife, cut through the bark and completely circle the stem. Then about 10cm away do another 'round-the-branch' cut. Remove the bark between the cuts. Some rooting hormone can be dusted on the stripped stem although it is not normally necessary. Now wrap the area in damp sphagnum or potting mix and cover with the plastic sheet. Tie off each end so it appears as if a sausage is on the branch.

An alternative way is to half cut the branch through with a shallow, slanting cut, flex the branch and, when the cut opens, dust with rooting hormone and place potting mix or, preferably, sphagnum moss in the cut and around the branch, then wrap in plastic as before.

Now patience is needed. Depending on the plant, it will take anything up to two years. Inspect the sausage occasionally and, when a good number of roots have formed, cut the branch off above the roots. Pot into a container, water well and presto! A new plant. Why not give it a try?

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Members are invited to write in about any problems they have with identification, health, where to place specific plants etc. as well as queries and comments on articles appearing in the magazine.

Our advisory members will endeavour to supply solutions and answers.

Write, fax or email to

Q & A – PO Box 91-728, Auckland

Phone/fax (09) 376-6874

Email marlowe@subtropicals.co.nz

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q...We have a raised bed along the rear of our property. It is southeast facing and gets sun in summer, but a fair bit of shade from the house in winter. Being in Point Chevalier, it also tends to be quite windy. We have has several large *Eugenia* trees removed and are now looking for ideas for a subtropical planting.

The raised bed is about seven metres by two metres and has a timber retaining wall about 80cm high. We need privacy from nearby houses and a site in the street behind us that will one day be built on. We are on a half site. The rest of the garden has bromeliads (about two hundred and fifty or more), tree ferns and a Port Wine *Magnolia* hedge.

Any suggestions for planting this area gratefully received.

Catherine Lee – Auckland

A...Popular agreement is that the most important (and first) step to be undertaken is the provision of or repair of the fence. The uncomfortable growing conditions are probably the result of the prevailing winds that sweep unimpeded across the upper Waitemata.

Ground draught is the most important. A gardener in Rotorua, close to the lake, was experiencing very slow growth. Unable to afford a high fence, he installed a low (65cm) wooden fence on the sixty-metre boundary parallel with the lake. In the following year he had more growth than in the six years since he had moved onto the property.

One of the drawbacks of a solid high fence in windy conditions is that when the wind hits the fence it rebounds and accelerates over the top, making the problem worse. The ideal is for the upper portion of the fence to be partially open to allow the wind through at decreased speed. This can be done without sacrificing privacy.

The planting

Coastal plants, whether native or exotic, can handle these conditions. Trees are not suitable as they eventually trunk, lose privacy and are no longer of use as a windbreak. Tall shrubs (to 3-4 metres) have foliage where it is needed, are eminently controllable and the choice is wide. Once there is some growth, underplanting of more colourful understory plants can start. The raised bed is only two metres deep, so stagger the plants for a fuller, more protective effect. Some suggestions:

Two to three taller plants to give scale – a clump of field grown *Kentias* (page 8), *Meryta sinclairii* for leaf contrast, multiheaded *Cordyline kasper*. For the rest, pine-needled *Psoralea pinnata* kept lowish, restiads, abutilons, brachyglottis, hybrid buddleias, coprosmas, hebes (some are winter flowering), some Fijian hybrid hibiscus are surprisingly tough but need sun, leucadendrons (colourful for long periods), *Metrosideros Tahiti*, dwarf nandina, pseudopanax, *Strelitzia reginae*. The area is small and, if happy, only a few plants will be needed. Make careful, long-term choices.

Sphenomeris chinensis

Lace Fern

Barbara Parris

This is a little-known attractive easy-care fern that can take sunnier drier conditions than those conventionally associated with ferns. It is a widespread species of the Old World tropics, ranging from Africa to Japan and Hawaii, and grows in open situations such as roadside banks, often on poor clay soils, where it is a tough primary coloniser.

The fronds are arched, fairly soft in texture, half a metre to a metre long and finely divided into wedge-shaped segments 2 to 3 mm wide. My nine-year old plants have a height of half a metre and a spread of 1.5 metres. They are composed of numerous crowns that someone more courageous might be tempted to split up.

In cultivation, high light levels for at least part of the day are desirable, if not essential. Overhead mid-day summer sun has not proved to be a problem, but shading out by other plants leads to a rapid decline in the production of young fronds. My plants are happy on white clay and the species is probably tolerant of a wide range of soil types. Pests are not a problem.

Summer watering in dry spells, together with a twice-yearly application of a good-quality general garden fertiliser, keeps them happy. They have even survived very light frosts without frond damage, contrary to their reputation in the United States as being 'tender, growing poorly when temperatures drop to 16 degrees C or below for successive nights.' Their only vice is the need for gardeners to trim the dead fronds.

Plants have occasionally been available mis-identified as *Lindsaea viridis*, a rare native species that is fairly closely related, but not nearly such a good garden plant.

Fascicularia bicolor

(syn. *F. pitcairniifolia*)

Brian Chudleigh

Fascicularia pitcairniifolia is another of the very hardy, viciously armed bromeliads best suited to a sunny spot in the garden, well back from the border. Like *Ochagavia carnea*, it offsets freely and grows to about 60cm in diameter.

A large clump makes a stunning sight as it comes into flower, with the leaves at the centre of flowering heads turning an intense red. The plant

in the photo belongs to Margaret Craig of Te Puke. We have *Fascicularia bicolor* in our Katikati garden growing well but, as yet, it has not flowered for us (it looks very much like *F. pitcairniifolia*).

- Native habitat is sheer, rocky cliffs along the Chilean ocean coast – hardy enough to grow outdoors in southern Britain.

NOTE:

Peter Waters, Bromeliad Society scientific officer and a noted bromeliad expert, tells me that about three years ago there was a new study of the genus *Fascicularia*. As a result, some of the five species were shifted to *Ochagavia* and the rest were reduced to the one species, *Fascicularia bicolor*. Ed.

Plants are still available for sale labelled *Fascicularia pitcairniifolia*.

BROMELIADS IN THE SUN UPDATE

Some further suggestions for sunny aspects.

From an article by Moyna Prince in the Bromeliad Advisory (Newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of South Florida):

Acanthostachys strobilacea

Aechmea aquilega (sun or shade), *Ae. bracteata* (likes warmth), *Ae. bromeliifolia*, *Ae. 'Little Harv'*, *Ae. pectinata*

Hohenbergia stellata

Neoregelia compacta, *Neo. johannis* (and hybrids), *Neo. macwilliamsii*,

Neo. marmorata, *Neo. sarmentosa*, *Neo. tigrina*

Neotanthus 'Cardboard'

Orthophytum gurkenii

Quesnelia testudo

Tillandsia usneoides (particularly useful draped over epiphytic orchid roots – helps them establish) *T. 'Creation'*

Wittrockia superba

Caution: These suggestions are for Florida gardens but should be relevant here. All are available locally.

- The comments in brackets are local, as are the following recommendations: *Neomea 'Strawberry'*, *Neoregelia concentrica* (and hybrids), *Neo. 'Guinea'*, *Neo. 'Mottles'*, *Neo. 'Plutonis'*, *Neo. sarmentosa 'Yellow Bird'*, *Neo. 'Super Ruby'*

Photos:

Top:

Sphenomeris chinensis (Lace Fern) photographed in Kerikeri.

Bottom:

Fascicularia bicolor (*pitcairniifolia*) photographed in Te Puke.

Photo: Brian Chudleigh





THE GREAT PRETENDERS

(plants that look subtropical but are hardier than you expect)

Neomarica caerulea – A SUMMER SAPPHIRE

Nick Miller

In an earlier article (winter 2003, page 26) I wrote:

...And might I finally put in a plea for *Neomarica caerulea*, a perennial with wonderful sky blue flowers rather like a tigridia. This flowers for weeks through the hot weather, every second day, and all the plants of it in our garden are synchronised in their flowering days. The foliage is good too. It should be in every garden!

According to the updated edition of 'A handbook of Bulbs and Perennials for the Southern Hemisphere' (originally written by Richmond Harrison and updated by Hugh Redgrove in 1991), it comes from Brazil, presumably from the cooler parts of that country. It seems reasonably hardy and will apparently stand frosts exceeding 15 degrees. It belongs to the Iridaceae, as the shape of the flowers would suggest.

The flowers are a beautiful clear deep sky-blue, about 9-10 cm across. They open mid morning and collapse at evening time, but a new crop appears daily – for some people. Ours appear every second day although, at the height of the season, a few flowers appear on the in-between days. The day before flowering, the buds look like blue candles. By the morning of the next day they have inflated into little blue balloons, which have opened by about 10am. Here at Lake Rotoiti they flower from just after Christmas until early February and provide a wonderfully cool look in the heat of summer.

The foliage is strap-shaped, leathery and a slightly glaucous mid-green - quite handsome in its own right. Despite being perennials, they are evergreen. The flower stem is very similar to the foliage, being flattened and of similar colour with the inflorescence developing from the mid-rib. For some unknown reason, not all of our plants are equally free-flowering.

Top left:

The exotic flower of *Neomarica caerulea*, and below, seed pods on the old flower stem that develops from the mid-rib of the leaves.

Top right: the one metre clump of evergreen leaves.

Bottom:

A drift of *Hesperoxiphion peruvianum* in flower, photographed at Cambridge in late autumn/early winter. After the flowers have finished, the plants become winter dormant.

Inset: The brilliant gold flower.

Photos: Grant Bayley

They definitely bloom better when they get plenty of sunshine. Just outside our living room window, we have a fine clump that has given us much pleasure every summer for at least ten years. Even at the end of the season there can be as many as twenty flowers out.

According to Hugh Redgrove, plants are better propagated from seed, as divisions from older clumps do not transplant readily. However, we have used both methods. A clump growing near our roadside produces seedlings quite frequently. These seem to germinate either right beside a tree fern retaining wall, or else in the mixture of leaf mould and road metal right on the road edge. (Most of the mad Aucklanders that roar up and down our narrow, winding road at holiday time seem to avoid them).

Hesperoxyphion peruvianum

(syn. *Cypella peruvianum*)

Another member of the iris family from South America, but from much cooler regions (2500 metres and above) in Bolivia (La Paz) and Peru. The RHS still lists this plant as *Cypella peruvianum* and describes it as Zone 9 (to -6.6°C), certainly hardy enough for much of the country.

An easily grown winter deciduous bulb, it produces a flush of bright yellow blooms on 45cm stems every few days (usually three), from autumn through to early winter. It is unusual in that few flowers appear in between the flushes (*Dietes* and *Neomarica*, also Iridaceae, are similar).

Of the five species – *H. herrerae* has violet-blue flowers and *H. niveum* has white flowers. *H. peruvianum* has a freesia-like scent which, like freesias themselves, some people cannot smell.

Information supplied by Eric Walton

THOSE PESKY RECOMMENDED CLIMATE ZONES AND MINIMUM TEMPERATURES

These seem to fluctuate wildly from book to book for the same plant. *Neomarica caerulea* was included under Great Pretenders for this reason.

Clive Innes – ‘they should be kept above 15°C, Reader’s Digest Encyclopedia – frost tender, minimum 10°C, Albrecht Llamas – Zones 10-11, RHS – Zone 10 (-1.1° to +4.4°C), Harrison – ‘all species seem to be reasonably hardy and have withstood frosts exceeding 15 degrees without apparent damage’. Who to believe?

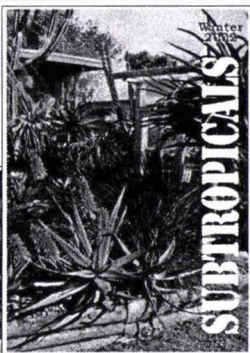
Nick Miller grows them well at Lake Rotoiti (Rotorua) and Rosemary Steele (Helensville) ‘says ‘ours have withstood several degrees of frost without harm’. So, if you want them, try them.

Rough rule of thumb:

If the plant has to be grown in a pot in greenhouse or glasshouse conditions in the writer’s climate zone then, no matter how reputable the information source, the minimum temperature requirement has to be downgraded. How far, only experimentation will resolve.

E.Mc.

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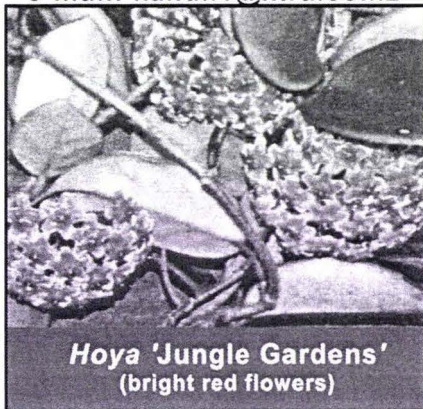
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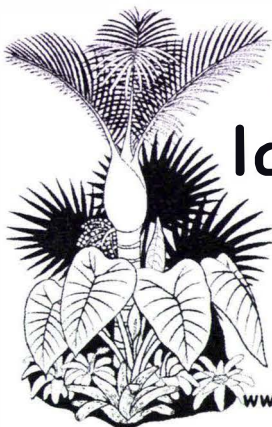
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THE THAI GUAVA

Russell Fransham

Psidium guajava, the tropical guava, which originated from Central America, has been in cultivation for several centuries and there are many different strains in different parts of the world.

The Thai guava is quite distinctly different from the pink-fleshed variety that is most commonly grown and, in New Zealand conditions, it has a much more tangy flavour. It is hard to describe but, in my experience, it is slightly acidic like a combination of guava and lime-flavoured Granny Smith apple!

It is the source of the canned guava juice industry in Thailand, the juice being clear and greenish like apple juice. It is also used unripe and pulped in mixed fruit crush drinks, and shredded in spicy sour green-fruit salads.

The fruit is very large for a guava, up to the size of a smallish apple (150 to 200gm), with white flesh and a thick meaty mesocarp around the central seed area. The skin ripens to a cream colour when the flavour is at its richest.

One of the sepals characteristically persists and grows across the end of the fruit like a cap. The fruit usually has irregular, slight vertical grooves running from pedicel to apex. It ripens from August to November, the later fruit being generally larger.

The tree is very vigorous and hardy in Auckland and the north. The young growth has red stems and in winter the leaves turn a deep maroon red.

Like all guavas, it needs good, rich feeding and hard pruning every year to maintain compact shape and good fruit size. Fruit is borne on the current season's growth and flowers are from November through summer. The tree can also be pruned to expose the beautiful bark and trunk(s) as a shapely, small specimen tree up to about three metres or so.

Guava moth is an increasing problem for all the guava family and is likely to be equally destructive to fruit quality with this variety.

The Thai guava strain is also grown in the Phillipines where it is known, predictably, as the Phillipine guava!

To sum up: it's a good-looking specimen tree/shrub, easy to grow here, very productive and doesn't need cooking to taste good. Well worth a place in a subtropical garden.

THREE BALSAMS FOR THE SUBTROPICAL GARDEN

Rosemary Steele

There are almost one thousand species of *Impatiens*, distributed throughout the world except for South America and Australasia. They range from annuals to perennial sub-shrubs and usually have succulent stems. Surprisingly few of the genus have been used horticulturally, despite the range of colours and flower shapes. Many more than just the New Guinea hybrids and the bright forms of *I. walleriana* deserve a space in our gardens. Three species which flourish here in the north are *I. auricoma*, *I. balfourii* and *I. marianae*.

I. auricoma comes from the Comoro Islands and hence is somewhat more tropical. It is a bushy perennial, 60-90cm high, with golden yellow flowers. It has sepals which are thick and reddish on the outside, enclosing the petals, the lower of which have reddish lines, presumably acting as nectar guides for pollinating insects. It flowers more or less all year and doesn't seem to set as much seed as *I. balfourii*. Once we had a form which held its flowers in clusters above the leaves looking, from a distance, much like a *Vireya rhododendron*. Unfortunately it proved less hardy and died.

I. balfourii comes from the western Himalayas and is an annual species 60-90cm tall. It grows naturally in light forest or in damp places in full sun. The flowers are borne above the leaves in branched racemes. Each is white, 2-4cm across, with two bright pink lower lobes. There are three sepals and the lowest is modified into a long narrow pouch or spur. The plants self-seed generously and make an attractive sight en masse. The seeds germinate in the spring and they flower throughout summer.

I. marianae is a species from Assam, grown more for its prettily marbled leaves than its flowers. It is a creeping perennial, not much more than 10cm tall with deep green leaves variegated with much paler grey-cream between the veins. Its flowers are pale purple, borne singly or in pairs in the leaf axils. It grows best in damp conditions and makes an unusual and highly decorative ground cover.

Clockwise from the left:

All frost tender

Impatiens marianae

I. auricoma

I. balfourii - rather orchidlike in appearance

An extra species to complete the page - *Impatiens niamniamensis* better known as 'Congo Cockatoo', a succulent perennial with rather brittle stems that grows to about a metre high.





OUT & ABOUT

The photograph opposite is of a small corner of the medal-winning display by **SUBTROPICALS** member Alex Schanzer at last year's Ellerslie Flower Show.

The design requirements for an imaginary couple (thirties, no children, wanting to relax and unwind outdoors after a working day) were that the area be functional, easy to maintain and, most importantly, a creative space that incorporated their love of native and subtropical plants with art in the garden.

The finished design included stainless steel light towers for nighttime use, soothing background sounds from the natural rock water feature and an original handpainted screen seen in the photo opposite. Colourful hemerocallis and bromeliads complemented the varied foliage of the natives.

SUMMER COMPETITION

So many good entries were received that we decided to use them over the following issues. In future, we will award the Touchwood Books \$50.00 voucher to each letter and/or photograph that we publish.

And the winning letter/photograph for this issue is:

***DATURA* 'Double Blackcurrant Swirl'**

Nadine Croucher

Being keen on brugmansias, I was very excited to find a couple of these gorgeous little plants for sale on a roadside stall! They were labelled '*Brugmansia* Double Blackcurrant Swirl'. I gave one to a friend and kept one for myself.

At the time, they were young and not in flower so we waited with great anticipation to see what they would do! The photo opposite (bottom right) is of the much awaited, lovely first flower on my friend's plant. As well as a perfect double flower, purple on the outside and silky white in the inside, it had a heavenly fragrance. This plant is in a well-drained, sunny position.

Photos:

Top: Alex Schanzer

Bottom left: Grant Bayley

Bottom right: Nadine Croucher

On doing a bit of research, I understand that this plant is a datura or Thorn Apple, not a brugmansia. The main differences are that the flower points up rather than hanging down, the plant is short-lived and is also much smaller than a brugmansia. It has a capsule fruit or seedpod covered in spines, hence the name 'Thorn Apple'.

The plant pictured produced two seedpods then died! My plant, which is in a pot under the eaves to protect the flowers from the rain, has had many flowers but none as lovely and open as the one pictured and none has produced seedpods. However it is on its second year.

Postscript:

The seeds are easy to grow and I have some available if anyone wishes to send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to -
Nadine Croucher, Whangarei Heads Road, RD4, Whangarei
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I would also be keen to hear from anyone who has seeds for the *Datura* Double Golden Swirl.

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BOOK REVIEW

Tropical Flowering Plants - A Guide to Identification and Cultivation

**Text & photography by Kirsten Albrecht Llamas
Robin Booth - a Northland viewpoint**

With a front cover displaying a Shell Ginger flower, this book caught my eye when it arrived. My first impression was that a large number of interesting species not shown in the many books I have, were here for my education and pleasure. I also found that the names of plants were sometimes different from what I knew them by and it is good to know that these names are the most accurate and up-to-date ones available (though new names can be very frustrating to the home gardener).

To me a slightly irritating feature of this book is that it lists plants alphabetically by family not genus so, if looking up a plant by its known name, you need to look up the index first. This is a little more time consuming, but the advantage is that you can see all the similarities of the family once you have tracked down the plant you want.

In a book just over 400 pages long, describing plants from thirty-one families means that not very many species from each genus are described but those that are, are done clearly and concisely. The personal comments at the end of each description I found interesting, although sometimes a different species that I wanted to know more about would be mentioned only in passing. The species mentioned are those that were found growing in the southern California and Florida areas.

The photos are clear and a helpful clue to the plant's identification. A good summary of the book is in the introduction:

This book is intended to be concise, detailed enough for students and professionals, and written in language that can be understood by the average plant enthusiast. Above all, I want the reader to enjoy tropical plants and perhaps search for something a little out of the ordinary for a container on the porch or a special place in the garden.

I feel this summarises the book well and it makes a good addition to my library. If the author ever writes an enlarged edition it will be very impressive.

Timber Press. ISBN 0-88192-585-3

**Available from Touchwood Books \$129.95 plus \$5 00 p&p.
(some seconds available at \$90.00)**

PLANT SOURCES for this issue

Fascicularia bicolor - Green's Bromeliads, Maungakarama, Exotica, Warkworth

Gloriosa superba - Wharepuke, Kerikeri, Joy Plants, Pukekohe, Pottering About, Whakatane

Hesperoxiphion peruvianum - Joy Plants, Pukekohe, Parva Plants, Tauranga

Hibiscus arnottianus (Wilder's White): Russell Fransham, Matapouri Bay

H. schizopetalus - Russell Fransham

H. tiliaceus - Russell Fransham

Hibiscus cultivars - Russell Fransham, Wharepuke, Landsend, Oratia, Auckland, Tippet's, Auckland, Pottering About

Impatiens auricoma - Nestlebrae Exotics, Helensville

I. balfourii: Nestlebrae Exotics

I. marianae - Wharepuke

I. niamniamensis - Generally available in houseplant sections

K. forsteriana (Kentia Palm) - Landsend, Nestlebrae Exotics, Pottering About

Ligularia reniformis - Wharepuke, Joy Plants,

Musella lasiocarpa: Landsend

Neomarica caerulea: Joy Plants, Wharepuke, Nestlebrae Exotics

Neoregelia johannis rubra - Exotica

Orthophytum gurkenii - Greens Bromeliads

Paphiopedilums: Keith Goodwin, 400 Spencer Road, Lake Tarawera, RD5 Rotorua - Mail order

Psidium guajava (Thai Guava): Russell Fransham

Sphenomeris chinensis - Fern Factor, Newtons Road, RD5, Christchurch - mail order

• Remember that at the SUBTROPICALS PLANT SALE 2004, there will be an enormous range of large and small, usual and unusual subtropical plants. It will also be a great chance to meet our members who are specialist growers and some of whom are also plant breeders.

The Palm & Cycad Society of New Zealand
meets on the first Tuesday of each month excepting January.
The society arranges field trips and has a seed bank, library
and a quarterly magazine.

Enquiries: (09) 296-7699 or write to PO Box 3871, Auckland

BACK COVER STORY

MUSELLA – a strange relative of the banana Dick Endt

What is perhaps the most curious exotic plant we have seen in New Zealand for many years is the new musella – Chinese Yellow. As the name suggests, it is a native of china, coming from the south-west province of Yunnan.

Botanically known as *Musella lasiocarpa*, it is a close relative of the common banana – with a difference! What makes this plant so impressive is its enormous, erect yellow ‘flower’ sitting atop a fat leafless stem. The large, 25cm diameter, yellow lotus-like flower is, in fact, an inflorescence, consisting of hundreds of flowers, the structure of which is rather similar to the true banana.

We first encountered these strange plants when we visited China some years ago. In the city of Kunming, we saw them growing in temple gardens, botanical gardens and later, as we became more familiar with musella, we noticed them growing on the boundaries of intensively farmed fields in the countryside. More than just ornamentals, these banana-like plants were utilised as food for the many pigs seen around farms.

In order to describe the musella in more detail, it should be explained that it is very similar in its development to the true banana. The plant consists of a large fleshy corm from which pseudostems form in succession.

A pseudostem consists of a series of overlapping leaf stems which, as the ‘stem’ grows, develops new leaves until maturity, usually about two years in New Zealand. Each pseudostem reaches its climax when the floral structure emerges, followed by flowering, fruiting and seed development. Thereafter the stem dies and is replaced by new pseudostems repeating the process. Often, many stems emerge at the one time giving the plant a bushy appearance.

The banana-like ‘stems’ of musella are sheathed in stiff blue-green leaves reaching about 1.5 metres in height. Surrounding these ‘stems’ are many small suckers. The yellow inflorescence develops when the emerging green leaves reduce in size, changing in form from leaves to yellow bracts arranged in a rosette at the apex of the pseudostem. The leaves on the pseudostem die off when the inflorescence emerges. The inflorescence sits atop the rather fat, conical stem, remaining erect unlike a banana inflorescence which develops in a pendulous fashion.

The true flowers are situated at the base of each yellow bract (appearing like petals). Usually about five flowers develop at each bract, initially only pistillate flowers (female), later only staminate flowers (male). The pistillate flowers develop into small banana-like fruits which, at maturity produce hard, black seeds. The yellow flower-like rosette continues producing more bracts until finally the pseudostem dies. The small suckers around the base remain in leaf. During the month of July, the plant will lose all its leaves except the yellow rosette. Growth resumes again about November.

The whole plant is so bizarre that one may wonder where to plant it. The musella's main attraction is the distinctive yellow flower-like inflorescence. Because of the size of the rosette it demands immediate attention. The plant itself is attractive when in full leaf and the blue-green leaves are spectacular. In China, they interplant musella with other bananas, using Mondo Grass as a ground cover.

Plants grow quickly and seem quite hardy. The above ground portion of the plant may get damaged, but the plant will produce new shoots from the underground corm if this does not get frozen.

Musella lasiocarpa is easily container grown, as the ultimate height is not much more than 1.5 metres.

Photos:

Dick Endt

Back cover:

In Yunnan Province, in southwest China, tall bananas are underplanted with musellas and *Ophiopogon japonicus* (Mondo Grass) on a sloping site.

Inside back cover:

Top left:

This shot was taken at Landsend in late August a few years ago. Because of the mild growing conditions, the leafless trunk with its colourful inflorescence brightened winter and early spring days.

Top right:

A close-up of a musella, taken in China, complete with a bright moth or butterfly and showing details of the flowers.

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