

SUBTROPICALS

Summer 2004





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.

SUMMER 2004

Volume 3 Number 4

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AUTUMN ISSUE

COPY DEADLINE

All copy must be received by the 31ST JANUARY 2005

Looking forward

Twelve issues, dozens of articles and photographs - after three years I am very conscious of the immense contribution our members have made in writing knowledgeable articles for the magazine.

Many of the subjects covered often receive little mention in the reference books and sometimes even on the internet (where the information can sometimes be alarmingly inaccurate or at best not appropriate for our conditions).

In 2005, I look forward to **SUBTROPICALS** continuing to grow in depth and coverage, with the continuation of support from our writers and readers (not to mention photographers).

Included with this issue is the renewal form for next year's subscription. Remember that you save \$5.00 if you renew by January 1st - there is no charge for associate members.

To help keep our membership growing steadily, why not give someone a gift subscription for Christmas. You never know, they might become addicted to subtropical gardening! An application form is included in this issue and the cost is still \$30.00 if it is sent in before January 1st.

It only remains for me to wish each and every society member an enjoyable and happy festive season and may the sun shine and the rain fall at appropriate times.

Marjorie Lowe
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FRONT COVER STORY

ORNAMENTAL BANANAS

John Prince

(from a talk given at the Subtropicals Conference 2004)

I find pretty much any bananas to be ornamental plants, but then I'm into collecting edibles, amongst other things, and my interest in bananas came first from trying out the eating quality of different varieties. At once I loved the large tropical leaves, and the feeling created by walking amongst multiple clumps of them. As Bob Riffle puts it, correctly in my view, 'there are no more tropical looking subjects than the bananas. They are second only to palms and ferns for creating the look and feel of the tropics, especially when they are in flower and fruit'. They are 'unexcelled for creating a lush effect...' (Riffle, *The Tropical Look*, 1998)

For many in this country, that's an overstated view. Commercial fruit growing of *Musa* selections stops at 30 degrees off the Equator. In our windy, cool climate, outside the real subtropics, they can look tatty. The fastidious amongst us, if they deign to grow them, are often given to excessive pruning of the ripped or spent leaves, so they don't give offence to themselves or their equally over-sensitive friends. That doesn't do the plants any favours. The leaves are the main engines of energy gathering and, to a lesser extent, of plant growth so you are reducing the effectiveness of the plant to manufacture food, even as you are trying to grow it in a climate that is marginal for it. Then there is the coolness of northern New Zealand for such a long part of the year. Plants often look good into early winter and to the end of June. But eventually a toll is taken, and they yellow out on the leaves, become wind-whipped and blackened by frost and are a constant reminder that things would be easier about 1000km further north. Still, they do recover, and will look good again by Christmas as the undamaged new leaves push out of the protection of the stems.

Front cover:

Two *Musa velutina*, at this stage only 1.5m high and just starting to produce their pink fruit, planted by a large *Syagrus romanzoffianum* (Queen Palm). The owner feeds them with sheep pellets to maintain vigour in the face of competition from the palm roots.

Inside cover:

Top left: the bold, variegated leaves and fascinating striped bananas of *Musa* 'Aea'e' or 'Koa'e'.

Top right: The first row of banana flowers showing on *Musa basjoo*.

Bottom: *Musa mannii* in flower and fruit.

Photos: John Prince

For half the year, or more if you have a really good spot for them, they'll match Riffle's description, especially if you have regard to their requirements for plenty of fertiliser. At the head of the list, definitely mulch, and give plenty of potassium. These are the two most important things for healthy bananas and there is an interesting, recent major research paper out on this point which Ben McNeil drew my attention to.

I'll consider ornamental bananas first in terms of the interesting colour in some of the varieties grown normally for their fruit. Secondly, I'll look at ones that have particularly beautiful flowers or leaves, but are not interesting in terms of fruit edibility.

Some of the ones grown for colour are now reasonably commonly available in garden centres. For several years now the form known as *Musa zebrina* has been about. The leaves are heavily marked with irregularly-shaped claret blotches. When well grown, it certainly attracts attention of the "What's that?" sort. It can suffer lots of winter damage, but a good clump of the little stems is easy enough to shelter under, or amidst, other things. A more correct name for it is actually *Musa acuminata* ssp. *sumatrana*, but we are probably stuck with the established, albeit outdated, synonym. If you want another alternative, try "Blood Banana", which it is also known as. Many forms of it have been selected and marketed in various places, as often happens with strikingly-marked plants which can easily develop interesting variations.

The other small ornamental which is not uncommon now is *Musa velutina*. This is a two metre high plant with pink flowers and similarly pink fruit skins over a white, heavily seeded pith. One much less known, which I'd particularly like to draw attention to, is *Musa mannii*. The photo might not register clearly enough that it is a quite distinctive pink-red colour in the flower bell. It is unlike anything else in our collection of about 57 *Musa* species and forms. The stems are black, the leaf midrib is akin to the flower bell colour, and there is sometimes also a slight colour sheen on the underside of new leaves too. It forms many stems quite quickly, so the best way to continue to enjoy the flowering is to remove enough of the stems so that you can enjoy what's left to the maximum. It comes from Assam and northeast India. The unripe little fruit are green. In the flesh, so to speak, you won't confuse this beauty with other ornamental bananas you might have seen in this country. It lacks the amazing bright red of an upright *Musa coccinea* (syn. *M. uranoscopos* – discussed in 'Subtropicals' Vol.1 no.2:16 and Vol.2 no.3:30). In its own right, however, I believe *Musa mannii* to be just as good an ornamental as its better known scarlet relative from Indochina.

Moving to taller ornamentals now, there is the one that I imported seeds of from Chiltern Seeds a long time ago. They sold it as *M. violacea*,

but the correct name of that seems to be *Musa ornata* var. *violacea*. Considered overall, *Musa ornata* is an immensely variable Indian species, with many different flower colours present in one form or another. This one grows to about 3.5m, and the upright pale violet (sometimes tending to pinkish) inflorescences end up quite a way over your head. They can disappear into a forest of stems, but the colour is so beautiful, in a delicately pale and wan way, that a little management will be repaid with your visual pleasure. At times the leaves can reveal bluish tones on top, and some burgundy toning may show up on the underleaf.

Bigger yet, and vigorous under cold conditions, is the strongly-growing Japanese Fibre Banana, properly called *Musa basjoo*. This is the one that people enamoured of subtropical gardens, but located in southern England or in cool parts of Europe, will often grow, even if they have to wrap it to get the stems through winter. It has somewhat more strength against prolonged cold than most *Musa*, so these people get a revived banana plant in their gardens for the northern summer. There are others now for this sort of gardener to experiment with (e.g. *Musa itinerans*, to name one for which there is seed available), but they lack the wonderful, summer-sun-is-rising quality of an emerging *Musa basjoo* flower bell.

Another non-dwarf one in our collection is the enigmatic banana whose seed I received, about 1990 or a bit earlier, as '**Giant Pisang**'. Since "Pisang" is the generic word for bananas in Malay, it doesn't tell you much. There really are enormous bananas in places such as Papua New Guinea, but this proved not to be one of them. I'd imagined stems going up to sixteen metres, but this is nothing like that, perhaps reaching four metres at the most. It's only moderately vigorous, with few stems at a time, and it died in areas that became too crowded and shaded. I've kept it going because, whatever it is, it has a wonderfully toned salmon-apricot flower bell. I tried to get an accurate identification from an expert located in Britain, but it didn't work out. I'll try again, now that I have a digital camera. People with an eye for subtropics, such as Robin Booth, immediately see, in the shading and colour tones, that it is unique in this country, and presumably a distinct species, and understand why I've been keen to keep it going. Sorry, no pictures this time, as spring is not a good time to photograph many bananas in New Zealand.

Amongst the bananas normally grown for their fruit, as well as for any beauty that is seen in them, are the red-stemmed Indian forms. '**Mysore**', also known as '**Red Misi Luki**', is one of these, and the stems can be purplish-red. It is the main commercial banana in India. The Indian lowland bananas are very heat-demanding, and I don't recommend them as first choices for our situation. If you only have limited space, and you want good eating bananas, then there are a number which will outperform cv '**Mysore**'. Probably even more touchy and tropical is '**Red**

Dacca'. This can get real colour in its stems, and the fruit are red-skinned also and are much more yellow in the flesh than the bananas we are used to eating - a collector's item in New Zealand. Probably the best choice, if you want red-stemmed bananas, is '**Dwarf Jamaican Red**'. Because of its small stature, it is easier to shelter in the warmest spot you can find. It has never produced fruit for me, but I'm still trying it in better (I hope!) locations. All look at their best in the January to early June period here and all would like more heat than we can give them. Nevertheless, at their best, they can be wonderful to look at.

Various bananas can show pale pink tonings in their stems, or the stem margins on the leaf blades. One which I am going to watch with great interest as it grows is '**FHIA18**', a new import to New Zealand from the big Honduran breeding program. It is several years away from showing what it can do as a fruit-provider, but it is already giving me subtle pleasure. There are other varieties with tones and shades that have interest for the collector, but the final one to mention here is easily distinguishable. It's the Hawaiian variety called '**Aea'e**' or '**Koa'e**'. It occurs at a little altitude and is probably not as touchy as the red forms, but the highly variable white markings on the leaves come from a lack of chlorophyll. As bananas are well out of their natural range in this country, not having a full complement of chlorophyll means that they may lack some vigour in a way that is not tested in a hotter climate. Still, it does come from a little altitude in Hawaii and it does grow here fairly well. At its best it is really striking, not least because the banana skins are naturally striped cream and pale green shades on the fruit skins. That is, the fruit are not irregularly marked like the leaves, but quite regularly striped. I've not had good fruit on it outdoors and you have to be very careful when propagating it, as it can revert to a plain form if you choose the wrong sucker - that is, one which is not carrying any variegation from that section of the root. It's also notable as the most expensive banana from the specialist nurserymen of California and Florida. They offer their plants at US\$120-150.00 each, prices that are many times more than those of their run-of-the-mill plants.

Top left:

Photo: John Prince

A *Musa ornata* var. *violacea* that has been flowering and producing bananas for some time.

Top right:

A very young *Musa ornata* var. *violacea* inflorescence that has set its first few fruit and is only about two metres high against the much taller leaves.

Bottom:

***Musa basjoo* with many bananas set, well above the photographer's head in the enclosed garden at Nestlebrae Exotics.**





Thunbergia mysorensis **Jonathan Voysey**

Munzerabad Creeper

Thunbergia, with ninety species of shrubs and climbers from Africa and India, includes many climbers that are evergreen perennials.

T. mysorensis is a most exotic looking vine from the Nilghiri Mountains in southern India. While not as aggressive as *T. grandiflora*, it is still a vigorous, woody-perennial vine. The flowers are an unusual combination of gold, yellow and rust-red. These are not merely in pendent racemes, they hang down in long strands that may reach the ground if their support is not high enough. It is best grown over a pergola that is not used as an accessway as the flowers secrete much nectar that drips down profusely on the unwary and makes a mess on hard paving.

There seems some confusion over flowering time – Albrecht Llamas says 'intermittently in the warm months' (zones 9-11); RD Encyclopaedia of Plants and Flowers says 'spring to autumn' (min. 15°C) and an Australian source suggests winter/spring and 'best where winter day temperatures don't drop much below 15°C'. Experience here seems to indicate late autumn/winter (we need feedback on what our members have experienced). Frost tender of course and requires average to fertile, well-drained soil in full to part sun. Fast growing.

WHAT'S ON

HEROIC GARDENS FESTIVAL 2005

**The festival will be held on Saturday and Sunday
19th and 20th February from 10am to 6pm.**

**There will be twenty gardens open, many not seen before
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www.heroicgardens.org.nz**

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BOOK REVIEW

GARDENING ON THE EDGE; Drawing on the Cornwall Experience

Reviewer - Nick Miller

I ordered this book at the recent Subtropicals conference and find it an unusual and welcome addition to the plant maniac's bookshelf. It provides a long-overdue replacement for Q. Arnold-Forster's *Shrubs for the Milder Counties*, which was published over half a century ago in 1948. I have mentioned that volume before in these pages. The purpose of the book under review is to stimulate interest in a host of plant species that are grown near the extreme edge of their 'comfort zone', in Cornwall and similar insular climates. Does this sound a familiar theme? Yes, what else is 'Subtropicals' all about, if not that!

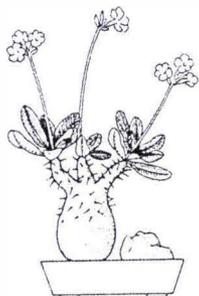
Many of the species discussed are recent introductions (or re-introductions) to western gardening and many of them are very handsome or beautiful plants. Certainly, when I was browsing through Peter Cave's catalogue recently, *Gardening on the Edge* was more useful to me than any other book on my shelves, when it came to some of the newer introductions in the catalogue.

The book has eleven authors, who each contribute one chapter. 'Gardening at the Edge of the Sea', written by Peter Clough, could have been written in New Zealand, since New Zealand plants dominate it. It takes a more imaginative approach to the problem than we generally see locally.

'Recent Woody Plant Arrivals in Cornwall' is written by Tom Hudson, a Kiwi who has been living in Cornwall since 1987. I like one of his opening paragraphs:

'Unfortunately there has been a dramatic decline in interest in new woodland plants in Cornwall. This is the result of a number of factors: the decline in interest of owners of traditional Cornish woodland gardens; the attitude that all worth-while plants are already in gardens; the fact that so many woodland gardens are run by committees; and the odd notion that it is more important to garnish woodlands to gain more visitors than to experimentally plant untested and new material.'

Warnings for us all here! For 'woodland' just substitute 'subtropical'. Tom runs through about eighty genera of trees and shrubs, concentrating on the more recent introductions. Some of these are already in this country, but you're unlikely to see them in your local garden centre. They have to be sought out and this chapter will give you the incentive to do so.



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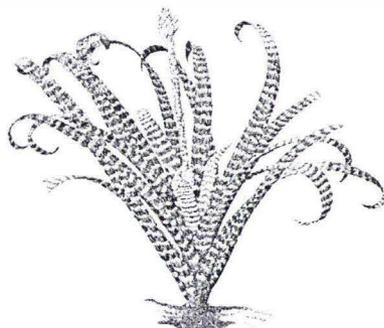
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Bananas
Musa 'Aea'e' to
Musa zebrina
Aristea major - seed

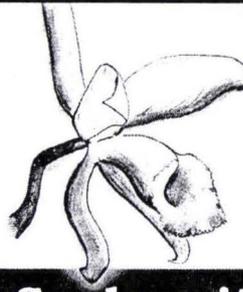
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There are many plants listed which do not have tropical requirements, but which certainly have tropical looks – just what many of us need. It is worth purchasing the book for this chapter alone.

There follow chapters on ‘Conifers’ (which will make those of us who think that conifers are dull think again), ‘Palms’ (you will look at our Nikau with new interest) and ‘Proteaceae’, which focuses more attention on the rainforest types (as opposed to *Protea* and *Leucodendron* etc.) than is usual. Genera such as *Embothrium* and *Lomatia* merit our attention. They come from rainforests and would look very much at home in many subtropical gardens.

The chapter on ‘Bamboos and Restios’ is very useful – I had not realised how many bamboos originate in South America and, again, many are new introductions. ‘Hedychiums and Others’ deals with the variety of plants we generally refer to as ginger. There are some desirable new species mentioned – if we could only get them. The chapter on ‘Climbers’ is also excellent – it includes perhaps the best description of *Lapageria* cultivars that I have come across. There are some fresh ideas about familiar plants. ‘Ferns, Clubmosses and Horsetails’ is self-explanatory and worth reading, but I would tend to avoid the horsetails (*Equisetum*) as some of them can be pestilential weeds. The section on ‘Ferns and the Future’ is thought provoking. Finally, ‘Some Uncommon, Untried or Tender Plants’ goes on a world tour through the milder parts of the world, suggesting species to try out. Some of them you may be familiar with; many you won’t know. All sound worth seeking out.

This 249 page book, is profusely illustrated, with colour photographs scattered throughout the text. Most are of good quality, a few rather less so than we are used to seeing these days. The one frustration that I had is not the fault of the editor or the authors. It is simply that all too many of the exciting plants described within its pages are unlikely to make their way to New Zealand, under the existing paranoid, money-grubbing and over-bureaucratic plant import restrictions that we now have in place. Let us hope that, one day, common sense will return to Aotearoa.

To summarise, if you live in Auckland, Tauranga or other coastal parts of the northern North Island, you should find this book very interesting. If you live further south or inland and want the subtropical look for your garden, it will be invaluable.

General Editor: Philip McMillan Browse

Published by Alison Hodge, 2004. ISBN 0 906720 33 8.

\$104.95 (incl. P & P) from Touchwood Books.

Carissa macrocarpa

Natal Plum

Heather Greaves

Natal plums are South African natives that can grow up to nine metres there. We are near Kaitaia and have two in our driveway. They are about ten years old and are only about 1 and a half metres tall. They are beautiful shrubs with dark green shiny leaves and white flowers (about 4-5cm wide). The flowers remind me of frangipani - five narrow petals, very white, almost waxy and with a beautiful fragrance.

The Natal Plum is covered with forked spines about 6cm long. Apparently they stop the baboons from eating the fruit. It must work, as we haven't lost any fruit to baboons yet! (or possums!)

The shrub is covered with fruit most of the year here. The fruit is red, more oval than a plum with a slightly pointy end. Robin Booth (Wharepuke, Kerikeri) had some fruit at the first Subtropicals conference and his appeared to be more spherical than the ones on our trees. The fruit is edible. I have tried it and it doesn't really have a strong taste, just sweetish - and with lots of seeds. I have read that you can make jam or jelly from the fruit.

All the books say you can take from cuttings but we have been unsuccessful so far. We have propagated a few plants from seed. They are very slow growing but we will continue to try to get more, as they are beautiful shrubs.

DUCKLING INTO SWAN

Diana Holt

Sometimes, one wonders why a small insignificant plant catches the eye? In this case, a 50 cent seedling with green waxy leaves caught my attention, about seven years ago at the Avondale Market. Told it was a lily from South America, I left it on my deck, in a fairly open but sheltered position along with numerous other plants. I saw it lose its leaves, forgot about it for a year or three. Then I was going to throw it out, but saw that the bulb was green so I repotted into a bigger pot (15cm) and forgot it again.

(continued on page 21)

Top:

The ripe, red, plum shaped fruit of *Carissa macrocarpa* appear amongst the unripe, green fruit and are present most of the year.

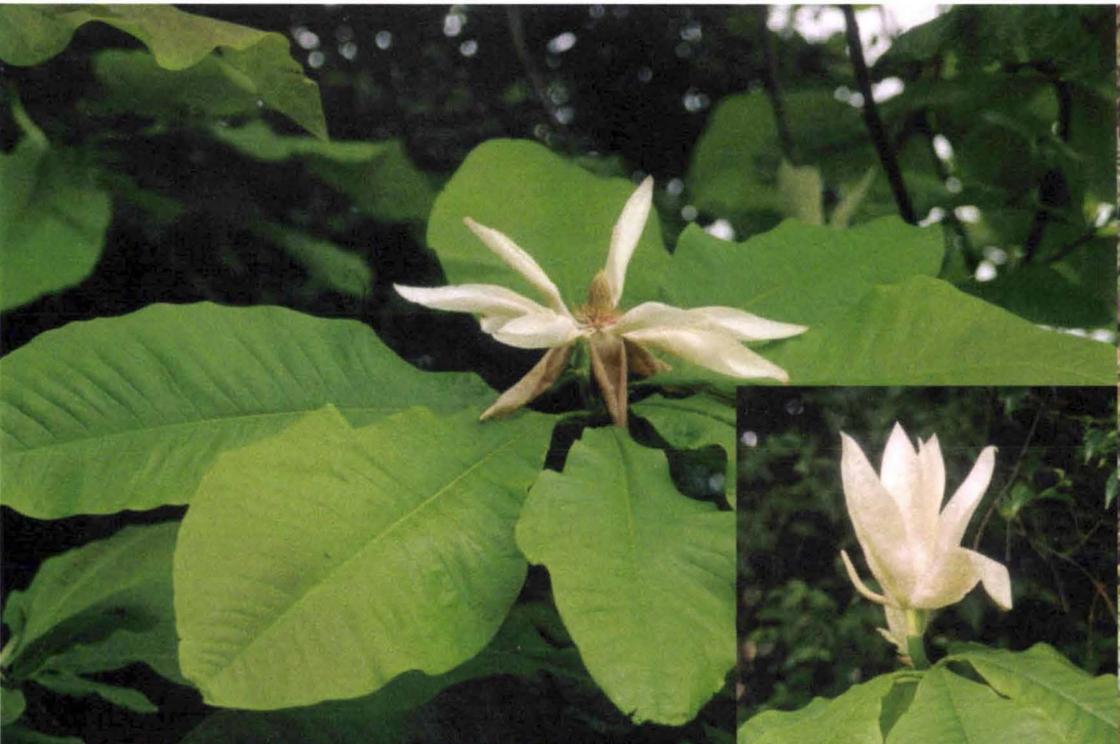
Photo: Russell Fransham

Bottom:

Left - The handsome leaves and flowers of *Veltheimia capensis* photographed in winter in a Westmere garden.

Right - The inflated seedpods of a plant in Pt. Chevalier photographed in early November.





THE GREAT PRETENDERS

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

MAGNOLIAS WITH LUSH LEAVES

Rosemary Steele

There are several species of *Magnolia* that are deciduous yet have large subtropical-looking leaves. *M. tripetala* is native to eastern North America, growing in deep rich soil along mountain streams and swamp edges through the Appalachian Mountains, Pennsylvania, Ohio, southern Kentucky and to the coast of North Carolina. It grows nine to twelve metres tall and has leaves over 50cm long with tapering bases, which are arranged in umbrella-like clusters (pseudo-whorls), giving it the common name of umbrella tree.

As the leaves emerge in spring, they are covered with thick silky tomentum which is shed as the leaves mature. The creamy white flowers appear at more or less the same time and, despite the specific name, have 6-9 petals, 10cm long and narrowly ovate. They only last a day or so and are followed by bright red seed pods (cones) filled with scarlet seeds.

I also grow *M. macrophylla*, which comes from North America in a similar range of states but extending further south into Mississippi and Florida. It has even larger leaves: 95 x 35cm, with cordate bases. They are pale green above, downy white below and are also arranged in pseudo-whorls. The flowers are 30cm in diameter and fragrant, with 6-9 petals which are broader and more substantially textured than *M. tripetala*. The inner three petals are spotted or tinged with purple towards the base. The seedpods (cones) are rose pink with red seeds. This flowering and fruiting information has been gleaned from the *New RHS Dictionary of Gardening*, as my plant has not yet flowered despite being at least three metres tall. (It will grow into a tree twenty metres tall eventually.)

Top:

A *Magnolia tripetala* flower, with the lower petals collapsing, is surrounded by beautiful, large leaves.

Inset:

A new flower opening.

Bottom:

The last of the season's flowers on a *Eucryphia moorei*.

Photo: Nick Miller

However, there is another species closely allied to *M. macrophylla* that began flowering when only one metre tall. This is *M. askei*, and as I write (November 18th), it has one flower fully out and more buds to come. It is altogether a smaller plant, and grows to ten metres with leaves up to 60cm long and flowers 13.5 x 6cm. Its range is restricted to northwest Florida. My plant is now two metres tall after ten years, although this may reflect intense root competition from a neighbouring pohutukawa and a large privet bush that began life as a rootstock for a Korean lilac. The latter is about to meet a pruning saw and Vigilant herbicide, so it will be interesting to see how the magnolia responds to more light and food.

Despite their deciduous nature, I think all these species deserve a place in a subtropical garden not only because they provide floral interest at a time when many other plants are only just recovering from winter, but also for their dramatic foliage. There are, of course, large-leaved evergreen species like *M. delavayi*, but that could be another article.

AUSTRALIAN EUCRYPHIAS: CHARMERS FOR THE COOL SUBTROPICS

Nick Miller

The genus *Eucryphia* is confined to Chile and Australia. My one experience with a Chilean species was unsatisfactory (it died) but the Australian, *Eucryphia moorei*, has been growing in our garden for nearly twenty years. It has grown into a slender tree some eight metres high and 2.5m wide, with attractive, shiny, pinnate leaves, which give it a fern-like appearance. The new foliage is shaded white on the underside and in windy conditions this livens the whole appearance of the tree. This species has a markedly upright habit, meaning that it will fit into a restricted space, as our one does.

In February and March it is covered with hundreds of pure white, saucer-shaped flowers, about 2.5cm across, pleasantly scented and very popular with the bees. The clean white of the flowers, coupled with white stamens, gives the flowers an extraordinarily virginal appearance and they are a great favourite in our household.

This species comes from the wet mountain rainforests of New South Wales and Victoria, preferring a cool, moist, sheltered situation. A bush setting would be most appropriate. I cannot imagine it thriving in hot dry coastal areas in the north, but I would imagine the Waitakere Ranges (near Auckland) would be an ideal home. If you have a south-facing, wooded hillside, then it might be happy in the north. Our tree produces masses of seedpods, but I have yet to find a seedling.

The photograph was taken at the very end of the flowering season and captured the last two flowers on the tree. When in full bloom, little foliage would have been visible.

The other main Australian species is *E. lucida* from Tasmania, where it is known as Leatherwood and its honey is very popular. It resembles *E. moorei*, but the leaves are simple and the flowers are slightly larger. The cultural requirements are similar to those for *E. moorei*, but I have not grown it as yet. There is a form known as 'Carousel', which has flowers of a particularly attractive soft blush pink with crimson stamens. A miniaturised version of *E. lucida* is known as *E. milliganii*.

These species are not subtropical, in the strict sense, but they are beautiful rainforest plants that blend well with the lush foliage that we associate with subtropical gardens, and they produce a wonderfully cool visual effect at the hottest time of the year. They are not common in garden centres. Blue Mountain Nurseries, of Tapanui in West Otago (well I did say they liked cool conditions!) list a number of species. I see they also list a new species, *E. wilkei* from Queensland, similar to but larger than *E. moorei*, which they expect may be more tolerant of warm conditions. Why not give it a try? Eucryphas are one of those rare plants which, when in full flower, will bring a smile to any face.

Continued from page 16

Well this year, about May, I saw new leaf growth along with a baby bulb and a flower stalk appearing. The 'now really interesting' plant was moved into a position where its development could be monitored. The little duckling was turning into a swan. With still no idea of what it was, I took a photograph of the flower and showed it to a knowledgeable friend who immediately said 'Veltheimia'. A new obsession has started!

Since then, I have self-pollinated each flower head. The result was a seeded flower head (see photo) that was as attractive as the flower itself. My next step is to grow the seed on successfully. As the seed is hard (like kowhai), hot water treatment or scarifying seems indicated. I would be interested to hear from anyone who has tried to grow this seed and their results. I, in turn, will report back on my efforts.

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Veltheimia capensis

Forest Lily

From South Africa (south-western Cape and Namaqualand), this member of the lily family is dormant during the dry summer period. With the autumn rains it starts into growth, blooming in winter. The flowers are followed by bladder-like green fruits mottled red and about 2.5cm in diameter. Similar growing conditions to cyclamen - well-drained soil in part shade, although in New Zealand it seems happy in a sunny situation. Established clumps flower best if left undisturbed.

GROWING ORCHIDS IN THE GARDEN

Jim Gilchrist

(from a talk given at the Subtropicals Conference 2004)

The orchid family is the second largest plant family after grasses. Many thousands of species have been named and probably just as many more hybrids. Many orchids are nondescript or don't suit our conditions. However, there are many that are very showy and fit our growing conditions extremely well but seem to have been overlooked as garden subjects by most commercial nurseries.

Of all the orchids grown, the bulk of the showy ones come from the tropics. To many people the tropics are Indo-Asia, Malaysia, Singapore, Central and South America and Africa. Yet we know that Mount Kilimanjaro in Kenya has snow on it all year round, despite sitting on the equator. Many of the tropical orchids that we grow come from high altitudes. Many cymbidiums and dendrobiums come from the valleys and foothills leading up to the Himalayas. Other famous high altitude orchid areas are Mount Kota Kinabalu of Sabah, Malaysia, the Owen Stanley ranges of New Guinea, the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia, the high sierras of Brazil, the mountains of Mexico and the western side of the Andes in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and northern Chile.

In all the years I lived in Auckland, I rarely saw orchids growing in people's gardens, and if I did they were usually crucifix orchids (*Epidendrum radicans*) or Poorman's orchids (*Bletilla striata*). Sometimes I would see cymbidiums growing on balconies in full sun - never fed or watered. Amazingly some of these plants lived on for years, never flowering but always surviving. I would often see bromeliads, staghorn ferns and monstera but not much else.

In 1990 I tried my hand at flasking orchid seed in vitro and had some measure of success. As a result I suddenly had an excess of orchid seedlings to play with. I had often thought of growing orchids outside but had been confused by the contradictions in many orchid books. However, I managed to acquire 'Growing Orchids', a series of four books written by J.N. Rentoul. (Unfortunately, these are now out of print but can be picked up from time to time at Orchid Show trading tables or in secondhand bookshops.)

Rentoul lived in South Australia and he illustrated his books with many photographs of orchids growing on the trees in his garden. Many were growing on casuarinas (She-Oak). I had a red casuarina growing out the back of our section in Birkdale at the time, so I tied a few *Dendrobium kingianum* hybrids to the tree and they seemed to do well.

About the same time, I bought an odontoglossum from Andy Easton which I placed in a slat basket and hung under another tree in my backyard. Some time later it won reserve grand champion, best odontoglossum and best novice exhibit at one of the North Shore Orchid Society shows. Also, at the same time, I purchased a tray of Andy's cattleya crosses that I put into my fernery. Those that I put in similar slat baskets or tied to pongas thrived, while those that I left in pots perished.

Rule of thumb: any tree that has a fairly open canopy, does not lose its bark and can host ferns and lichens is a good candidate for growing orchids. Some of the trees I have used with success are casuarina (red and green), pohutukawa, feijoa, puriri, bottlebrush, macrocarpa, pine, ponga and also Chinese Windmill Palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei*) and Canary Palm (*Phoenix canariensis*). A good way to work it out is to go for a walk in our native bush and observe how the native epiphytic orchids, ferns and astelias are growing.

I have found that the best way to start off is to tie them to the host tree using pantyhose or stretchy lycra. **Don't** use sphagnum moss as the plant roots will stay in the moss and not travel to secure the plant to its host. Epiphytes are fertilised every time it rains. Dust, pollen and bird droppings etc. are washed down over the plants by the rain. They can survive long periods of drought once they have become established, as they pick up moisture from the early morning dew and humidity created from the host tree itself.

Many of these orchids come from areas where there are frosts on open ground every year but they tend to colonise areas where the frost does not penetrate or settle. In July last year, we experienced minus 7°C. Some orchids were lost but most survived, although some still bear the scars. Often the areas they come from tend to have very dry, cold winters and hot, humid, wet summers – the reverse of our weather patterns. By mounting the plants in situations protecting them from the prevailing wet weather, they seem to cope with the cold as long as they can dry out quickly. In summer, water them when you water the garden. This seems to keep them happy. If bromeliads are grown as companion plants, the close proximity of their water-filled tanks helps to increase the humidity.

When orchids are grown outside I believe that, once they are established, they show greater vigour. The flowers are larger, there are more of them, they last longer and you will get show-quality plants. A large specimen plant in full flower is truly a sight to see! Te Puna Quarry would have to be the best place to view orchids growing outside: cymbidiums and zygopetalums growing as terrestrials; cattleyas, laelias and oncidiums growing as epiphytes; and epidendrums growing as both – only about ten years into a one hundred year project.

Some cool-growing cattleyas and associated orchids, with their habitat temperatures, rainfall and humidity figures.

Cattleya forbesii was discovered growing on rocks and trees in the Rio de Janeiro region. Some plants have a very faint scent. It is considered to be an intermediate grower but I don't really know if that is meant to be in size or temperature requirements. The flowering time is March. The climate in its habitat in Brazil is warm and humid and the average maximum temperature ranges from 25°C in January to 17°C in July with 60 - 80% humidity.

Cattleya guttata – The average maximum temperatures vary from 25°C (January) to 17°C (July) Fifty-year extremes are a high of 40°C in summer to a low of 3.2°C in winter. Associated orchids are *Cattleyas leopoldii* and *intermedia*; *Oncidium flexuosum*; *Gongora* spp; *Encyclia* spp; *Maxillaria* spp.

Cattleya intermedia is so-called because it stands halfway in size between *Cattleya labiata* and *Cattleya loddegessii*. It blooms in September, October and November and occasionally in April and May. There are three to nine flowers on a peduncle.

Cattleya leopoldii grows in moderately warm temperatures of 24.5°C (average maximum) in January to 19.5°C (average maximum) in July (fifty-year extremes of 40°C max. to 2.7°C min.). Rainfall is about 1800mm and humidity is 60 to 80%. The driest months are June and July with 50-75mm of rain. Associate orchids are *Cattleya intermedia*; *Oncidium flexuosum*; *Promenaea* ssp and *Maxillaria* ssp.

Cattleya loddigesii – the climate is warm, with wet summers and cool, dry winters. The average maximum temperature for the year is 17.7°C – 22.8°C for January and 16°C for July. Extremes for a 50-year period are 36.7°C and minus 1.7°C. Average rainfall is 1410mm with less than 25mm per month in July and August. The humidity is very high in the summer but probably only about 50-60% in the dry season. Frosts occur every winter on open ground.

Cattleya walkeriana – The climate is cool and humid but not cloud forest. A 1540m high cloud cap is frequent, with mists and light rain. The average maximum January temperature is 22°C and 12°C for July, with extremes of 33.9°C and minus 3°C. Frosts are common in winter. Humidity ranges from 60 to 80%. Other orchids found in the same locations are - *Oncidium varicosum*; *Schomburgkia crispa* and *Sophrontis cernua*.

Reference: The Brazilian Bifoliate Cattleyas and their colour varieties by J.A. Fowlie.

Doodia australis
(syn. *D. media* subsp. *australis*)
Barbara Parris

Pukupuku or Rasp Fern

Doodia australis is the most common and widespread member of the genus in New Zealand, ranging from the Kermadec Islands to Marlborough and northwest Nelson but most frequent north of the Waikato and the Bay of Plenty. It is not a plant of dark wet bush and prefers light lowland and coastal forest, bush margins and roadside banks. Often it will persist in grassland after forest clearance, as it is not eaten by stock.

The young fronds are pink to red when grown in strong light. They are once-pinnate, with the pinnae narrowly triangular-oblong, and usually about 30cm long and fairly upright.

If I could only grow one species of fern it would have to be *Doodia australis*. It is a long-time garden favourite of mine for its virtues of colourful young fronds, produced over a long period, that age gracefully through green to silver when dead and do not need removing when old unless you are a garden-tidiness freak. As well, other advantages are resistance to light frosts (minus 3°C or less), freedom from disease, non-palatability to grazers, browsers and munchers of all kinds, the ability to thrive in full sun and indifference to drought. Plants will form slowly-expanding clumps by producing new plants at the base of the old ones and by sending out stolons up to 10-15cm long. However, this is not an aggressive plant that will smother everything within reach.

LETTER

The article ‘**How about a cuppa?**’ – by Robin Booth in the spring issue of **SUBTROPICALS** has made me curious. I have heard of making coffee from coprosma berries before, so...

How easy is it to prepare coprosma for making coprosma beans for a beverage?

What does it taste like?

Which coprosma species has the best flavour?

If the taste is any good, does anyone think coprosma could be grown as a commercial crop for making ‘boutique’ coffee/s?

I would appreciate anyone’s experience with this.

Grant Bayley

What more could you wish for in a fern? Relatively few ferns have such attractively-coloured young foliage and none produces it more or less throughout the year. Most other ferns look much better for the removal of their (brown) dead fronds. Resistance to light frosts is always a useful character for those of us who garden on the temperate side of subtropical. Very few of the smaller ferns will take full sun without the need for additional watering. With *Doodia australis* there is the added bonus of deeper colouring in the young fronds with increased exposure to sun. It will grow in shade, but is much slower-growing there and the young fronds tend to be green.

In my garden *Doodia australis* grows in several sites, most spectacularly in a sunny rockery, where the young fronds look dramatic amongst lichen-covered boulders draped with pink *Lampranthus* and the glaucous-foliaged *Senecio serpens*. It also looks great edging thirty metres of scoria path by a planting of *Vireya* rhododendrons. It is seriously under-rated as a garden plant and is much better suited to sunny sites than the ubiquitous *Asplenium bulbiferum*, which is often seen stressed and bleached to an unattractive yellow by over-exposure to sun. In the garden it qualifies as a no-maintenance fern and in pots it is easy-care. Try it soon.

Top:

A fine clump of *Doodia australis* growing in a shady corner at the Regional Botanic Gardens at Manurewa. The photograph was taken in November.

Photo: Margaret Peart

Bottom:

Close-up of the fronds of a *Doodia australis* growing in shade but with full sun at midday. The fronds can vary in colour from pink through to deep magenta-red, depending on the amount of exposure to sun.

Photo: Ray Welsh

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A CYCAD FOR THE COLLECTOR

Kevin Johnston

Encephalartos villosus is one of those rare plants some may be fortunate to have in their collections. It is one of a large genus of cycads from South Africa that boasts many of the world's most beautiful species of cycads.

E. villosus comes from a warm, moist habitat with a typical annual rainfall of 1000-1200mm per annum, similar to Auckland except that most of the rain falls in summer. In our conditions it is relatively fast growing.

Because the trunk is underground (subterranean caudex) this cycad is stemless. The fronds are upright and can achieve a spectacular three metres in length if grown in favourable conditions, which include light or dappled shade, a deep, rich moist soil and shelter from frost. It can also be grown in the sun, but a more yellow and squat appearance will result.

Aechmea nudicaulis

Marjorie Lowe

There are several varieties of *Ae. nudicaulis*, all of which grow as both terrestrials and epiphytes in their native habitats in central Mexico to Panama and the West Indies to southern Brazil from just above sea level to nearly 1500 metres.

Ae. nudicaulis var. *cuspidata*, native to Brazil, is one of the toughest and most attractive, growing in dappled shade to full sun. Sunlight accentuates the leaf markings and coloured leaf tips.

Compared with some bromeliads, its flowering period is relatively brief but most reliable. The brilliant yellow and red upright spikes arrive each year in November to early December – very festive.

Other varieties available here are; *aequalis* – semi-pendent spike; *flavo-marginata* – leaves have cream-yellow margins and *nudicaulis* – leaves blushed red. Cultivars available include 'Mary Hyde' and 'Silver Streak'.

Top:

A female *E. villosus* with three seedheads, growing in Mt. Eden in good volcanic conditions. The leaves have reached over 2.5 metres.

Inset: Unpollinated, the seedheads have ripened and are collapsing

Bottom:

A large clump (19 spikes) of *Ae. nudicaulis* var. *cuspidata* in full sun.

LETTER

YET ANOTHER CUPPA!

‘HOW ABOUT A CUPPA?’ So wrote Robin Booth in the spring edition of **SUBTROPICALS** this year. He briefly discussed growing the ingredients for a cup of tea or coffee. Someone of about my age remarked to me some ten years ago that their friends then were saying that one sign of ageing was that you were either having a hot drink or counting the time down to the next one. I cast no aspersions on my somewhat retired friend Robin Booth, of course!

Of the mild stimulants, widely imbibed in large areas of the world in the form of hot drinks, there is another one that can be grown in its raw plant form in New Zealand. That is yerba maté tea, the favourite drink of many Argentineans, as well as some of the inhabitants of Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil, where it is particularly well known in the regions bordering Argentina. If you see Argentineans clutching gourds or metal *bombillas* and drinking a hot liquid from them, probably through a metal straw, then you are watching people drinking maté (pronounced “mah tay”) tea.

The tea is made from the lightly roasted leaves of *Ilex paraguayensis*, a member of the holly family. It is briefly discussed in the *RHS Dictionary*, which rates it as zone 10. That seems much too pessimistic to me. In the late 1980s I imported seeds of it from northern New South Wales and the resultant shrub has been unfazed by what our miserable New Zealand winters have thrown at it. I haven’t tried to make tea from it, though I have certainly drunk quite a few cups from a large packet we once had a friend buy for us in Sydney. The packets I have seen in this country were miserably small and horribly priced when I went looking for it here. I suspect, and some reading confirmed it, that good tea is made by skilled roasters and that whatever I produced would be pretty questionable by comparison.

There are enthusiasts for this beverage. It is claimed to have antioxidant properties and there are people promoting its use who allege that the lift it gives the drinker comes from mateine, rather than caffeine - the former supposedly being better for you. Whatever, it’s a friendly, social drink and ritual in Argentina. I suspect my roasted leaves might be more palatable than Robin’s roasted coffee beans!

John Prince

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Cussonia paniculata
(see back cover)

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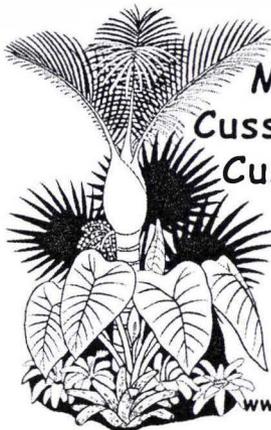
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Aristea major **Rosemary Steele**

(syn. *A. thyrsiflora*)

Aristea major is a tall perennial member of the Iris family with narrow evergreen leaves 100-120cm long, a short rhizome and fibrous roots. Early in (spring) summer, 1-1.5m tall, reddish stems bear numerous clusters of deep blue flowers 2cm in diameter. These open in succession over at least two weeks and are followed by capsules containing several seeds.

I have grown this handsome South African for many years and have never found it to be a problem as a weed, unlike *A. ecklonii* which has been declared a surveillance pest plant by the Auckland Regional Council. This latter species seeds freely and has become well established on many dry banks and roadsides in the area.

There are over fifty species of *Aristea*, found in tropical and southern Africa and Madagascar. As far as I am aware, only *A. major*, which comes from south-western Cape Province, and *A. ecklonii* have been used as garden plants in New Zealand.

Aristea major is naturally found in coastal regions and prefers free-draining soil and full sun. It has proved hardy in all the frosts we have had, though one British source suggests minus 5°C is the lower limit. It grows easily from seed, however the seedlings are said to resent root disturbance and so should be pricked out into paper or peat pots before planting out. Established clumps can apparently be divided immediately after flowering, though I have never tried it.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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

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Dichroa versicolor

Dichroa versicolor is an evergreen *Hydrangea* relative from China, introduced to New Zealand by Glyn Church, owner of Woodleigh Nursery near New Plymouth. It is an upright shrub growing to two metres with large, glossy, dark green leaves. These are at least 15cm long, oval and taper to a point. The leaf margins are slightly serrated. The shrub bears starry blue flowers in terminal panicles. Each flower is only 1cm diameter, with deeper blue stamens and, as there are at least one hundred flowers per panicle, the effect is very showy. Interestingly, I gave a cutting to a friend and when it flowered the flowers were pink. Don Ellison's "Cultivated Plants of the World" describes it as having pink flowers, so presumably the plants react to the presence/absence of lime in the soil. Unlike *Hydrangea*, the flowers are followed by small dark purple berries which last a long time and add interest.

We have two plants, one grown under shade cloth and one against the southern wall of the house and both have been equally unaffected by frost (Zones 8-10, -8°C). Peter Cave grows it in the Waikato and also finds it hardy. It is apparently happy in full sun, though I should imagine it would want plenty of water in summer. Our plants have flowers all year round and have reached just over two metres in eight years. They respond well to being pruned and grow readily from the cuttings thus produced.

Another species, *D. febrifuga*, is also available though I do not think it is as good. It has smaller leaves and smaller clusters of flowers which are a somewhat insipid pale lavender colour (though perhaps that could be altered by changing the soil acidity too). It comes from the Himalayan foothills of Central Nepal, China and Vietnam.

Glyn Church considers that *Dichroa versicolor* is one of his best introductions and I would agree. In fact, I think it is one of the most garden-worthy plants anyone has introduced.

Photos:

Top left: A clump of *Aristea major* metre high evergreen leaves.

Top right: Blooms on the 1.75m flower spikes are an intense blue.

Bottom: *Dichroa versicolor* in full flower.

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SUCCULENT TREES FOR SUBTROPICAL GARDENS

Brian Timms

(continued from the spring issue)

Beaucarnea

These are so familiar that it is easy to overlook how wonderfully bizarre they are. All beaucarneas are trees and all have narrow, fissured trunks arising from large swollen bases. Their drooping, narrow, sharp-edged leaves are quickly shed to form a mop-like head on a naked trunk – small wonder people have called them ‘Dr. Seuss’ trees! Beaucarneas all form large, heavily branched inflorescences with many, small, creamy flowers, from near the tops of mature trunks.

B. recurvata (Ponytail Palm) from Mexico (, is now a very common plant, appearing in every garden centre; loved by landscape gardeners and villa owners, who often plant them in small pots where they make cute specimens but will never approach their potential (see p. 43). The up to ten trunks can reach 10-15m from a globose base of up to 2m or more across. Leaves are drooping, recurved and dull green. Overseas botanic gardens do contain gigantic beaucarneas and I have seen them getting close to those dimensions. These plants all have single trunks dividing into a number of branches a couple of metres above the ground, although the plant description calls for multiple trunks arising directly from the base, which is what ours do. There seem to be different forms available, some having red emergent leaves. It is worth checking out the plants at your local garden centre to get a good one. I have one that sheds its lower leaves too soon to get a really graceful head, but it is much too large to get rid of now.

B. guatemalensis, from forested areas in Guatemala and Honduras, is available in small numbers, imported from plantations in Central America as brutally hacked trunks. But most seem to recover and grow rapidly when they are planted out. The leaves increase considerably in size but the spiral remains and they are more attractive and softer looking than *B. recurvata* but potentially nearly as large in size. The single branched trunks emerge from a conical base. The specimens for sale are often delightfully delicate with long, narrow, often spirally twisted leaves – frequently emerging pink or red. As a result of their trimming for transport, they tend to branch very heavily, and I think a better specimen

Back cover :*Cussonia paniculata*

Opposite:

A young *Yucca rostrata* that has formed a small, half-metre trunk, concealed by the leaves. These are long-lasting and it will be some years before the trunk becomes visible.

is obtained by judicious pruning at planting or shortly afterwards. They make wonderful (although large) bonsai for an outdoor pot and will then retain their small, narrow leaves and delicate beauty.

B. stricta from the Mexican state of Oaxaca, is uncommon here but well worth seeking out (*Subtropicals* Vol.2, no.4: 28,29). The main differences from the previous two are the shorter, stiffer, deep blue-green leaves and the conical, heavily fissured base. *B. stricta* is also potentially large but grows much more slowly, so don't hold your breath!

Nolina

The only tree-form nolina I have seen here is *Nolina longifolia* from Mexico. Alas! Although vanishingly rare here, this is potentially fabulous. The tall, relatively narrow, heavily fissured trunk is sparsely branched and topped with heads of very long narrow shiny green leaves with lethally sharp edges. I had one for several years, but it did not appreciate our wet, cool winters and frequently lost its growing tips to rot. It was also rather slow growing, but perhaps in a very well drained and warmer spot it would do better.

Yucca.

Another variation on the theme of fissured trunks, sparse branches and tough narrow leaves. Many yuccas are ground-based rosettes; some form short or long trunks. Yucca leaves are generally shorter and stiffer than beaucarneas or nolinias and the flowers, while also appearing in a large inflorescence, are individually much larger. The effect is often spectacularly beautiful. One tree-form, *Yucca elephantipes* has become very common, thanks to massive cultivation overseas. It has been imported as bare trunks for a number of years now and is available from every nursery and garden centre. The term 'flooded market' comes to mind. This plant is often seen in offices or showrooms where it is obviously becoming etiolated. The normally stiff, upright, pointed' dark-green leaves become lax and pale. However it is, as the name implies, potentially colossal, up to 9 or 10 metres, heavily branched from a large swollen base. Like *Aloe bainesii*, it is being marketed with no indication ever given as to how large it will grow or how fast. Considering its tropical origins (southern Mexico south to Honduras), it is surprising how well it does here.

Yucca brevifolia, the famous Joshua tree, can be found in this country, but whether a new specimen could be obtained, I have no idea. Certainly it is a very desirable plant, again potentially huge, with a heavy, swollen trunk and many spreading branches that can grow at odd angles, giving a bizarre and fascinating effect. The short, stiff, sharp leaves, blue- or grey-green, tend to cling to the trunk after they die, looking rather untidy. Perhaps someone could bring in a few of these, rather than the endless *Y. elephantipes*? Well, dreams are free!

Y. rostrata, the most desirable of all the yuccas, comes from northern Mexico to the southern United States. It has a single thin trunk, with a spherical head of long thin, light blue leaves with a very narrow cream margin. These twist ninety degrees over their 60cm length, the whole effect being extremely beautiful. The leaves stay on the trunk after dying, producing an effect rather like those pictures of old cycads, which Japanese gardeners wrap with straw for the winter. *Y. rostrata* is very rare in cultivation here and whoever can produce them in quantity (with some good marketing) will make a fortune. It does very well and grows quickly in Auckland conditions.

Dracaena.

There are a number of beautiful and highly desirable species from North Africa and some of its offshore islands. *Dracaena draco* from the Canary Islands is another plant beloved of landscapers and villa dwellers and another potentially alarmingly large grower. It forms a heavy trunk, with a beautiful pattern from shed leaf-bases. This pattern slowly vanishes, leaving a light, smooth, most attractive skin. The leaves are about 50cm long, narrow, smooth-edged and slightly succulent. Sometimes heavy surface roots will thicken, forming a buttressed look. Also, branches or trunk may drop aerial roots, seemingly at random, which I have never seen actually reach the ground. A large panicle of white, scented flowers forms once the trunk is one or two metres tall and branches (usually three) will grow around this next season, resulting in a most attractive umbrella shape, though this is very variable. Viable seeds form easily (perhaps *D. draco* is self-fertile like some agaves?) and the orange berries are attractive to birds, resulting in small plants coming up far and wide. *D. draco* has all the hallmarks of yet another pest. Occasionally *D. draco* doesn't flower and it ends up very tall and most spectacular, not to say bizarre, with a small head looking out of proportion to the tall heavy trunk (*Subtropicals* Vol.3, no.2:41,44).

Cussonia.

Despite being occasionally marketed as 'Mexican Blue Palms', cussonias are native to South Africa (they aren't palms either). With tall, thin trunks, fissured bark and swollen bases, the two species available here (*C. paniculata* - huge blue-grey digitate leaves, *C. spicata* - quite similar in appearance with even larger, digitate light green leaves and it branches more readily) eventually form large terminal panicles of yellow flowers and then branch. They are both rapid growers, do very well in Auckland conditions and are reasonably easy to obtain.

***Ceiba speciosa* (syn. *Chorisia speciosa*)**

From light open forests in tropical South America, this species does very well here. It forms a large tree with a swollen, light green or creamy

trunk heavily studded with massive thorns. The best forms are incredibly thorny, with scarcely any trunk visible. The leaves are medium-sized and palmate - a small plant looks like a rose trunk with marijuana leaves grafted on. The flowers are numerous and pink with various brown spotting. Legend says that no two trees flowers are the same. There are a few mature trees around Auckland, instantly drawing the attention of plant-spotters with their distinctive light trunks. Highly desirable but, as with many of these plants, I'd advise a large garden!

Pachypodium.

Coming from South Africa and Madagascar, beloved of succulent plant collectors, there are about twenty species, subspecies or forms, depending on whether the describer is a botanist or a nurseryman catering to the collector. All can be grown as potted plants in a greenhouse, with varying degrees of difficulty, but only two seem to be able to survive in the garden and only one of those fits our criteria.

P. lamerei is from Madagascar and forms a tree up to three metres - a swollen, tapering trunk with a lot of thin, very sharp spines in threes. The narrow shiny green leaves are up to 20-30cm in length and deciduous. The plant is vulnerable to wet and cold in our winters, often rotting at the tip then recovering and branching around it in spring. It must be very well drained and preferably a bit sheltered in winter. It will eventually flower at about three metres, with large cream flowers, which are terminal, causing the plant to form branches (usually three) that will then flower next season or after, eventually producing an umbrella shape. It is highly desirable but not as easy as many of our favourites. Incidentally, the *Pachypodium geayii* sometimes offered in garden centres is difficult in a green house and will not grow outside in Auckland.

Uncarina

Another Madagascan, *Uncarina* is a genus of small succulent trees with slightly succulent, slightly sticky, felty, deciduous leaves, and distinctive "Dutchman's Pipe" shaped flowers. A couple of species are available from specialist growers and I think they have some potential as garden plants or large outdoor pot plants in warmer areas (if you want to risk your precious specimens). They seem to seed fairly readily and may become more easily available.

U. grandidieri will grow up to 3 metres or so, with a swollen lower trunk, will branch readily and produces a huge number of bright yellow flowers.

U. roeosliana, only recently available, forms more of an underground caudex. It is splendid as a pot-plant, probably as hardy (if that is the right word!) as its congener. Also yellow-flowered, it apparently sets seed without human intervention in California. Whether it will even grow outside here I have no idea. A little challenge for the more adventurous among you!

PLANT SOURCES for this issue

Aechmea nudicaulis – Greens Bromeliads (Maungakaramea) Exotica (Warkworth)

Aristea major – Nestlebrae Exotics (Helensville) seed Joy Plants (Pukekohe)

Bananas – it pays to consult the experts.

Nestlebrae Exotics, Landsendt (Oratia) Russell Fransham (Matapouri Bay)

Carissa macrocarpa – Russell Fransham

Cussonia paniculata – Wharepuke (Kerikeri), Landsendt (also *C. spicata*), The Tree Place (Mt. Wellington)

Dichroa versicolor – Nestlebrae Exotics, Joy Plants, Woodleigh Nursery (Oakura, New Plymouth – (06) 752-7597

Doodia australis – Oratia Native Plant Nursery, Riverview Nurseries (Whenuapai) and native plant specialists.

Encephalartos villosus – this will take time to find but it is in the country and turns up occasionally.

Eucryphia moorei, lucida, milliganii – Blue Mountain Nurseries, Tapanui (03) 204-8250, chris@bmn.co.nz

Magnolias – Caves Tree Nursery (Hamilton) variety of unusual species, mail order only.

Thunbergia mysorensis – Russell Fransham

Veltheimia capensis – Joy Plants, Bay Bloom (Tauranga)

Yucca rostrata – this is very hard to find at present but one nursery has propagated some and these will be available late next year – watch this space.

BUYER BEWARE!

Rumour has it that an Auckland wholesale nursery is selling a large number of banana plants as *Musa velutina*.

However, one of our knowledgeable members maintains that they are definitely Cavendish. Won't there be rather a lot of cross gardeners around?

SUMMER COMPETITION

And the winner of the \$50.00 Touchwood Books voucher for the summer issue is John Hague-Smith of Papatoetoe. He writes:

This *Beaucarnea recurvata* (Ponytail) growing in South Auckland is probably well over thirty years old. The present occupants have lived at this address for twenty-five years and this plant was approximately a metre or more then (1979).

It is now just under four metres high, from base to crown. The base is one metre at its widest. The trunk is slender, probably 10cm in diameter at mid-trunk.

It flowered for the first time in late summer this year (February). Although there were bees and other insects all over the flower head, no seed was set. However, the birds said 'ta very much' and dismantled the flower stalk for nesting.

Photos: John Hague-Smith

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