A vibrant photograph of a tropical garden. In the foreground, there are several bromeliads with bright pink and red bracts and long, thin, yellow-green leaves. To the right, a large bird-of-paradise flower with dark, pointed bracts is prominent. The background is filled with various types of ferns, including large, feathery ones and smaller, more delicate ones. The ground is covered in green moss and small stones.

Winter
2005

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.

WINTER

Volume 4 Number 2

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**SPRING ISSUE
COPY DEADLINE**

All copy must be received by the 31ST July 2005

AT LAST

Disasters of all kinds and far too many to count have dogged the winter magazine. Even at the colour printing stage it turned pear-shaped. But here it is at last and, as you will notice, the new print machine has turned it into a glossy – well the photos anyway.

Another successful Conference and Plant Fair was held at the ASB Stadium in June. (Details on page 6). Work has already started on next year's event as members are already indicating that they want to take part.

This year the Ellerslie Flower Show is providing a double marquee and calling it 'Hort-Galore'. A wide range of garden clubs and societies will have displays showcasing their specialist fields. **SUBTROPICALS** will be there, between the Cacti & Succulent Society and the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture stands.

Our display is called '**from the beach to the bush**' with plants ranging from dry to humid surrounding a small, paved terrace. In October we will start collecting plants for the display – any offers?

This issue contains some plants that you may not have seen or heard of before, but all are available for the discerning gardener.

Marjorie Lowe
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SUBTROPICALS

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FRONT COVER STORY

INTERESTING PLANTING FOR A RAISED BED

Down a slightly sloping driveway, the section flattens out and here during the rainy months of winter and spring water accumulates, draining away slowly. The alternative to planting bog plants that would find it too dry in summer (or have to be constantly watered) was to build a large raised bed where the owner could grow his favourite cycads and large succulents, interspersed with large and small bromeliads.

Half-rounds to a height of about 35cm were used to enclose the space, which was filled with 'Supersoil' mixed 50/50 pumice gravel. This mixture is weed free, fertile, drains well and retains a surprising amount of moisture in dry spells. The entire garden was covered with a layer of pebbles to retain moisture and discourage weeds.

The photograph on the front cover is of just one corner of the raised garden. The cycad at the back is not the usual *Cycas revoluta* but *C. taitungensis*. Much tougher and more cold resistant than its better known relative, it is also a faster grower. At cycad rates of growth this is a great recommendation for impatient gardeners. It is very tropical looking and has more feathery leaves than *revoluta*. For those with little space the fairly upright growth is a bonus. With all its virtues and now readily available, this particular species will probably end up displacing *C. revoluta* in the popularity stakes.

To the right is a very healthy and large red form of *Alcantarea imperialis*. When this comes into flower it will provide a spectacular sight (see the photograph of one in flower in this year's autumn issue).

Coming down to ground level are two very different plants. Several clumps of an *Aechmea recurvata* var. *benrathii* cultivar bring long-lived splashes of colour as they rise straight out of the pebbles. (see close-up and article on pages 16 and 17).

The brilliant green, ground-hugging and mounding *Schleranthus biflorus* adds a lush look. This hardy New Zealand coastal plant enjoys moisture but must have sharp drainage. Grown well is always an eye catcher.

Only four different plants (plus the pebbles) at a variety of levels and this corner of the raised garden is simple, dramatic and low maintenance.

Photo: Marjorie Lowe

ALPINIAS

Russell Fransham

(from a talk given at the Subtropicals Conference 2005)

The genus *Alpinia* is enormous. Many of them are quite tropical, but a handful are reasonably hardy in the north of New Zealand. They originate in the jungles of South and Southeast Asia (India to Northern Australia).

Most familiar is *Alpinia zerumbet*, 'Shell Ginger' from India. This is slow-spreading with glossy dark green leaves, paler on the underside, and grows to about two and a half metres (and more) in semi-shade. From the third year it produces showy terminal panicles of pendent white and pink buds which open serially to reveal a red-veined yellow interior.

The variegated form of *A. zerumbet* grows to about two metres and is dramatically and randomly splashed with bright yellow. The flowers are smaller, but the panicles often larger. Dappled light is best but both forms will grow well in full sun exhibiting evidence of sun-scorch at times.

CONFERENCE AND PLANT FAIR UP-DATE

With our second Conference and Plant Fair at the ASB Stadium we seem to be getting the hang of it. Fewer problems, better knowledge of the layout and, most important, great help from our members in the setting up, running and breaking down of the event.

General consensus at the conference was that this year's talks were even better than last year's. Everyone was relaxed and all felt free to interrupt the speakers with interesting and pertinent questions which meant that we all learnt a great deal more (and we hadn't forgotten our questions by the time question time came round – very interactive).

A couple of very interesting talks are already lined up for next year – with more to come. If there is any particular subject that you would like covered, please make suggestions to Brian Timms (09) 376-0335 or email - brian-carolyn@clear.net.nz

Members, old and new, are securing selling spaces now for next May. Several are specialists in specific plants – the aim is to have as much horticultural experience present at the show as possible. Our members include some of the most knowledgeable people in the country.

Continued on page 42

Alpinia malaccensis from the Malaysia/Indonesia area is very tall, reaching five metres in the tropics and up to four metres here in sheltered shady conditions. The stems rise vertically and leafless for the first metre or more, then arch outwards at the tips. The beautiful flowers are very similar to *A. zerumbet*, but appear in a compact, cone-shaped upright panicle in December. Occasionally, 2cm orange seed capsules are produced but, like the other alpinias, they have shown no tendency to spread by seed in New Zealand.

The leaves are paler than *A. zerumbet* with a very attractive lime-green chevron pattern. This species needs good shelter and medium to deep shade to look its best. Ideal under big evergreen trees, I have seen it planted on both sides of a path to form a vaulted green tunnel of foliage. An added attraction is the delicate spicy scent of the leaves.

Alpinia calcarata is also known as 'False Cardamom'. A vigorous, dense, one metre (plus) high plant with strongly cardamom-scented leaves, it is best in medium to deep shade where the leaves are darker and less damaged by sun and wind. The insignificant and brief summer flowers are terminal, small, red-veined and greenish. *Alpinia calcarata* is often sold in New Zealand nurseries as cardamom spice, which it isn't. The leaves can however be used to flavour food, but true cardamom spice is the ripe seed from a completely different ginger (*Elettaria cardamomum*) whose flower panicles emerge from the soil on separate stems from the leaves.

A. calcarata is tough and fast-growing and needs regular discipline to keep it in line. It is dramatic as a large groundcover under big trees, where it has room to spread out. It never seeds in New Zealand to my knowledge, so will not be a weed here.

Alpinia galanga from Thailand is quite tropical, needing a warm, shady spot in the garden with loose, rich soil. It grows to 80cm with beautiful, quilted-looking, shiny leaves. During winter it becomes shabby and stops growing until September when it sends up new shoots. At this point I cut off all last year's remnants.

The fibrous hard rhizomes are an essential ingredient in Thai cuisine, having a sweet, pine-needle-ish pungency. Two distinct forms are available: 'Red Galangal', which is stronger-flavoured and sends up red tiny flowers in big panicles and 'White Galangal' which is sweeter and more tender, with a milder flavour, and doesn't flower.

**MORE HELP IS NEEDED TO MAN THE SUBTROPICALS STAND
AT THE ELLERSLIE FLOWER SHOW.**

Alpinia caerulea is an Australian native, found in rainforest along the eastern seaboard. The common form is two and a half metres tall, with slightly glaucous, green leaves like Shell Ginger. The insignificant green tiny flowers produce spectacular panicles of deep blue seed capsules which last for many months, hence the common name 'Blue Ginger'. (Not to be confused with the purple flowered *Dichorisandra thyrsiflora* which is also commonly called 'Blue Ginger', but is neither blue nor a ginger – so much for common names!)

In the Atherton Tableland area, inland from Cairns, a different variant of *A. caerulea* is found whose leaves have deep maroon-red undersides. It grows to about one and a half metres and is quite happy in warm sheltered New Zealand gardens. It makes a dramatic, lush garden plant in dappled light, but in full sun it will scorch a bit in summer. This one has great landscape potential for Auckland and Northland.

All the alpinias need loose, reasonably fertile soil, shade and wind shelter to perform well. As long as drainage is OK, they will also do well in heavier, loamy soils. None of them shows any weedy tendencies. Frost would cause major damage to most species.

There are certainly many more species of *Alpinia* that would grow well here and make magnificent garden plants but with MAF regulations as they are now we will not see them in New Zealand in the foreseeable future.

• **This article will be continued in the summer issue.**

Inside front cover:

Top left -

Foliage of *Alpinia galanga* (known as White Galanga)

Top right -

Boxes of the edible rhizomes for sale in the markets.

Bottom -

A large stand of *Alpinia calcarata* (known as False Cardamom)

Opposite page:

Top left -

The large and beautiful inflorescence of *Alpinia malaccensis* and

Top right -

The striped leaves of its foliage.

Bottom left -

Yellow striped leaves of *Alpinia zerumbet variegata*

Bottom right -

The bicoloured leaves of *Alpinia caerulea*.

Photos: Russell Fransham





THE WALKING STICK PALM

Kevin Johnston

Linospadix monostachya is a small solitary, feather palm endemic to northeast New South Wales and southeast Queensland, where it is quite prolific in the understorey of the forest canopy. It is commonly referred to as the 'Walking Stick Palm' as it was harvested by the thousands for its slender stem to make walking sticks for the First World War veterans returning 'legless' as it were to their homeland.

Making an attractive garden subject, *L. monostachya* is ideal for underplanting in situations where parts of your garden have grown to create a canopy. Here it will mature slowly at two to three metres high. This palm is monoecious (i.e. has male and female plants) and the female plant in fruit is quite attractive with strings of red berries hanging from the crown. I would suggest planting three plants in a group to give a pretty good chance of getting both sexes.

Being a slow-growing, small palm, it has not gained popularity here and consequently only a few palm nurseries have grown stock – primarily for the collector's market. Despite this, it is very worthwhile and easy to grow. With many palm and exotic gardens coming into maturity more and more gardeners will be looking for something different to underplant with. It could also be used in those numerous courtyard gardens with their confined, narrow planting areas or indoors where it makes a very well-behaved pot specimen. Unfortunately as *L. monostachya* has not been widely grown it is not readily available. But, as an excellent, easy to grow, small palm for the urban landscape, it may have its day in the sun, or in this case the shade yet!

Photo: Growing under the shade of a high canopied pohutukawa. The berries are fat and bright orange. The new season's crop of berrying stems is emerging from the centre of the crown.

My first recollections of this delightful miniature palm go back as far as 1931 when, as a child, I encountered it from a German grandfather trying to teach me the art of sword fighting. One of his walking canes was a *Linospadix*, one of the many stripped from the northern NSW rainforests at the ending of WW1, to be used as walking sticks by returning, wounded diggers. The idea of conservation was never the issue then, and many acts of mass destruction against the flora and fauna were considered normal in the name of progress.

Len Butt – Society for Growing Australian Plants – May 2001

Davallia mariesii* var. *stenolepis

Squirrel's-foot Fern

Barbara Parris

Davallia mariesii var. *stenolepis* is native to China, Taiwan, South Korea and the Ryukyu Islands of Japan and is widely cultivated, particularly in the United States. Here in New Zealand it can sometimes be found in the baby houseplant section of garden centres and supermarkets.

It has triangular, very finely divided, medium green fronds up to 20cm x 15cm. These are produced on long-creeping rhizomes covered with whitish, greyish or red-brown scales. The rhizomes grow at the rate of 15 to 20 cm a year and often look as if they have attached themselves to tree trunks and are intending to climb, but they usually give up the attempt after reaching about 20cm above the ground, and slide gracefully downwards. They are much better at draping themselves over the edge of a raised bed or hanging basket, however, and in time will make a good ground cover.

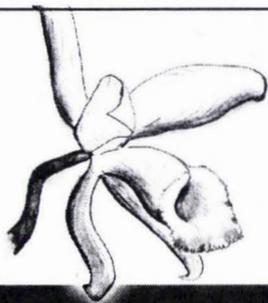
Cultivation requirements are fairly basic. Light shade or full sun for part of the day will keep the plants growing vigorously. They can tolerate light frosts, are fairly drought-resistant and prefer free-draining soils. Twice-yearly feeding, together with watering during prolonged dry spells, will keep them happy. In late winter to early spring new growth appears and the old, dead, reddish-brown fronds are shed. It is a good idea to remove these as they are rather unsightly. Apart from the need for an annual grooming this is a well-behaved and trouble-free plant that should be grown here more frequently.

Photo: Grant Bayley

After attempting to climb up the slender stem of a manuka, the leading edge of the furry rhizome has collapsed back onto the lacy leaves of the groundcover fern.

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recurvata
'Cardinalis'**

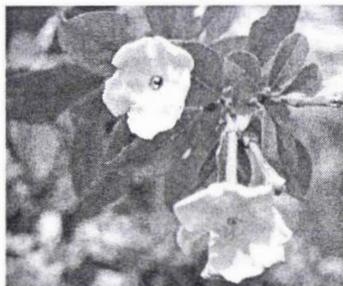
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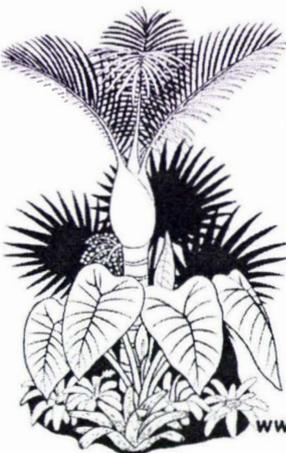
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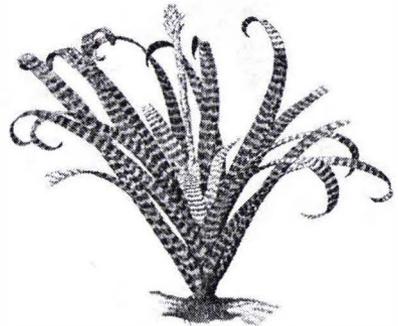
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A CHANGE FROM APPLES AND PEARS

Rosemary Steele

The casimiroa, *Casimiroa edulis*, or White Sapote is a member of Rutaceae, the family to which *Citrus* belong. Although oranges, lemons, grapefruit, mandarins, etc must be among the world's most important horticultural crops, not many people have encountered casimiroas. They originate in Central America and the Caribbean and have been introduced to California, Australia and New Zealand where they grow into large trees bearing heavy crops of fruit. However, unlike *Citrus*, the casimiroa fruit are extremely thin-skinned and usually there is only a very slight colour change as the fruit reach maturity. Once ripe, the flesh becomes soft with a texture not unlike ice-cream (they are sometimes called ice-cream fruit). Hence it is very difficult to pick them at the point where they are still firm enough to ship. As a result most fruit are sold locally as gate sales rather than sent to the markets by the crate load.

Fortunately for us, 'Wiki Woo' has a distinct colour change so the fruit can be picked as soon as they look yellowish and then continue to ripen. Once ripe almost everyone likes them: meltingly soft, edible skin, and sweet smooth flesh which defies exact description. 'Subtle blend of subtropical fruit', 'like fruity custard', 'like pear mixed with banana' are some of the attempts made recently by my customers. Then they say 'that is so delicious' and they buy them! Each fruit can be up to 12cm in diameter and, although there are four to five large pips inside, the flesh/seed ratio is good.

Many varieties can grow into large trees but casimiroas can be pruned to keep them at a reasonable height and some cultivars are naturally smaller. 'SueBelle' is one such, with fruit that also change colour slightly. Other varieties which do not show the marked colour change are also available: we grow some twenty different cultivars. Amongst our favourites are 'Max Golden' (not as golden as the name suggests, but delicious nonetheless), 'Maltby' and 'Te Puna selection', all bred in California except the last, which is a particularly heavy cropper, bearing medium-sized green fruit 8-10cm in diameter with a fresh slightly lemony flavour.

All casimiroas are easy to grow with very few pests (although waxeyes love the ripe fruit!) and are unfussy as to soil. They have handsome compound leaves with five to seven leaflets and are mostly evergreen, losing their leaves briefly in spring if frosted.

The fruit can be pureed and made into ice-cream, smoothies, etc. but the flavour is so delicate that they are best eaten as fresh fruit. We

normally just cut them in half and scoop out the pulp. They do not lend themselves to processing into jams or being bottled.

PROTECTIVE BROMELIADS

Marjorie Lowe

All motorists have heard of defensive driving but not all gardeners are aware of defensive gardening. Two of the bromeliads featured in this issue are rather good at fending off intruders – animals and/or humans.

The rather spiky-looking low plant in pink and green on the front cover and featured opposite is a cultivar of *Aechmea recurvata* var. *benrathii*, but larger than that plant. There are three varieties of *A. recurvata* – *benrathii*, *ortgiesii* and *recurvata* and many cultivars. All of these are impressively armed and the wise tend them in protective clothing. When planting it is essential to make sure that the ground is completely weed free to prevent the weeds coming up through the clumps. Just place them on the surface with a couple of small rocks to keep them upright. Used as edgings to plantings or paths, they form a protective barrier that dogs and, surprisingly, cats will avoid.

At flowering, which tends to be between autumn and spring, the inner leaves turn a brilliant red or orange or shocking pink. Some of the cultivar inflorescences last in colour for months. Attractive cultivars are 'Cardinalis', 'Suenios' and 'Aztec' (variegated). Much hybridised since the early days of growing bromeliads in New Zealand it pays, if possible, to buy plants at the flowering stage to ensure colour and plant size.

All are sun lovers that grow on trees and rocks in their native Brazil and most are hardy down to at least 0°C. *A. recurvata* var. *benrathii* is reputed to be hardy down to minus 7°C.

The wonderful flower spikes of *Aechmea distichantha*, pink with purplish-blue petals to the flowers, are shown to advantage in the large floral arrangement by Carolyn Melling on page 18. While the long-lasting flowers are very useful for cutting, in var. *schlumbergeri* the erect, grey-green, stiff leaves of the rosette have marginal spines and the terminal barbs are pointed and extremely sharp. Var. *distichantha* is similar in its pain-inflicting attributes and both are excellent plants to place beneath vulnerable windows as burglar deterrents.

They are hardy down to -2 to -7degrees and should be grown in full sun. Like the *Ae. recurvata* varieties you really would not like to weed around these plants unless fully armed yourself.





TROPICAL FLORAL FEASTS

Carolyn Melling

You've got the wonderful, lush tropical garden and there's nothing better than to bring a bit of it inside. Have you ever drooled over those lovely tropical holiday brochures and books where the tables are always festooned in lovely, freshly picked, tropical floral feasts.

Many of the plants in our gardens are great for picking, last for ages and look a million times better than what is usually available at the local florist.

Here are a dozen of the best plants I use that are easy to grow, last well and are perfect for a floral feast.

***Aechmea* species**

Aechmeas have a wide variety of flower types to choose from. The best ones I use are *A. gamosepala* (*A. cylindrata* is often referred to as the large form of *gamosepala*) for their long, showy pink tails. An established clump has many flowers so you don't need to feel guilty picking them. Other great ones are *A. distichantha* (see page 16) and *A. caudata*.

***Aeonium arboreum* 'Schwartzkopf'**

The black rosettes are just great to make an interesting display. They last forever, growing roots into the Oasis. You can simply replant them into the garden. (Vol. 1 no. 1)

Alocasia cucullata

This aroid has lovely heart-shaped leaves that look similar to Anthurium flowers. It clumps well so there is always a good supply without devastating the plant too much. Evergreen and hardy in winter. (Vol. 1 no. 4)

The almost black leaves of *Cordyline* 'Nigra', often sold as *C. angustifolia*, make a backdrop to the bright green slashed and holed leaves of the dwarf *Monstera deliciosa*.

The large, tall flower spikes in bright pink with purplish blue flowers are *Aechmea distichantha* and the slimmer, smaller pink flowerheads with china-blue flowers are *Aechmea gamosepala*.

Tying all these together are black rosettes of *Aeonium arboreum* 'Schwartzkopf' and the pale green, unripe fruit of *Monstera deliciosa*.

Photo: Carolyn Melling

Chamaerops humilis**Mediterranean Fan Palm**

This clumping fan palm is great. It produces masses of leaves, so with careful selection you don't spoil the look of the plant. The silver undersides of the leaf give an interesting look.

Colocasia fontanesii**Black-stemmed Taro**

Most subtropical gardens have this plant. The leaves are hopeless but the stems are great. In winter, if the leaves get shot, prune them back and use the stalks. They last for ages.

Monstera deliciosa* – dwarf form*Fruit Salad Plant**

Both forms are good to use. The dwarf plant I find better as the leaves are more manageable. It is hard to find this plant but we have them in our nursery. The unripe fruit is also good to use.

Musa velutina**Pink Velvet Banana**

This lovely small banana is almost a floral display on its own. You need a few plants in the garden if you dare to pick it for the house. Other banana flowers also work well. Banana leaves can be used as 'tablecloths'.
(Vol. 3 no. 4)

Musella lasiocarpa**Chinese Yellow Banana**

This odd banana has the best leaves. They last forever and have a lovely glaucous look. Because the plant has numerous suckers there are always plenty of leaves. They are smaller than most other banana leaves so work well for table arrangements.
(Vol. 3 no. 1)

Raphidophora decursiva

Another aroid, a philodendron that is gorgeous with its deeply-cut, drooping leaves. A well established plant won't notice a few of its leaves missing! The fruit also adds an interesting touch.

Strelitzia juncea**Reed Leaf Bird of Paradise**

Both flowers and leaves – the long-lasting leaves give the tall lines for the arrangement and the flowers are the ultimate for tropical displays.
(See the article in the forthcoming spring issue)

Stromanthe sanguinea**Red Rain**

This shade-loving plant has maroon undersides to its gorgeous green leaves and looks beautiful in a pink and black arrangement.
(Vol. 1 no. 4)

Tecomanthe speciosa

This New Zealand native climber is a must-have for the florally inclined. Its glossy leaves are so versatile for different styles – great to hide all the Oasis gaps. It doesn't mind being pruned every now and then, in fact, this helps it to flower!

BOOK REVIEW

TROPICAL AND SUBTROPICAL TREES:

A Worldwide Encyclopaedic Guide

by Margaret Barwick

Reviewer - Nick Miller

I encountered this book quite recently, in a Gisborne bookshop. I had not previously heard of it and had time to only have a very quick peek at it. The price seemed rather high, so I replaced it on the shelf and moved on. Then, a few days later, rather to my surprise, I found it as a new arrival in the Rotorua public library. I borrowed it, which led to this review.

This is a large and handsome volume, with over five hundred pages and 2,305 illustrations. 1981 of these are high-quality colour photographs, drawings or maps, the remainder are monochrome silhouettes to give an indication of the shape of each tree. The author is a New Zealander but has spent her married life largely in the tropics.

It is a fairly technical book, with a considerable amount of scientific data and, thankfully, a substantial glossary. However the style is clear and very readable. As already mentioned, the photographs are of a very high standard, ranging from close-ups of leaves, bark, flowers or fruit to fascinating habitat shots.

An initial section shows plant hardiness zones around the world and discusses the origins of trees, factors affecting the growth of tropical and subtropical trees, plant classification and the identification of trees. This is followed by Part Two, which is an alphabetical listing of trees from the tropics and subtropics, arranged by genera.

Slightly off-putting to the potential purchaser is the heading at the top of each entry, which lists a genus then a species - for example *Acacia farnesiana*. This gives the initial impression that only one species per genus is discussed. Further investigation (which I failed to carry out in the Gisborne bookshop) reveals that another fourteen species of *Acacia* are illustrated and described. To quote from the section on 'How to use this book':

"Each genus is represented by one species, which is the most relevant or common of its genus in its region. It is listed by its common name, origin, growth habits, cultural requirements, morphology and landscape use. A general description of its historic, economic and medicinal importance is also included. In a case where more than one

species of a genus is described, the data is reduced to the essential characteristics of the species.”

Despite this limitation, a formidable amount of information is included. If all species had been accorded the full treatment, the book would have run to several large volumes. The coverage of each major species is accompanied with a summary box covering origin, height, type, problems, soil requirements, uses, flowers and fruits etc. The summary box is colour-coded according to the major use of the species.

Part three is a series of cross-reference tables that show the significant characteristics (slow-growing, drought-tolerant, with showy fruit, etc.) of major flowering and foliage trees and is a useful reference to the right tree for the right site and purpose. A quick count reveals that about 315 genera have been covered, with several times that number of species. Some familiar names are there, for example *Agathis*, *Bauhinia*, *Casuarina*, *Eucalyptus*, *Jacaranda*, *Macadamia*, *Plumeria* and *Syzygium*. Often these cover unfamiliar species and there are many genera that will be strangers to most of us.

At almost three kilograms in weight, this is no field guide, but it is a valuable resource for tree enthusiasts and, of course, every library should have one. Keen gardeners planning a visit to the tropics should study this volume first and, if the baggage weight allowance permits, take it with them.

**Tropical and Subtropical Trees: A Worldwide Encyclopaedic Guide
by Margaret Barwick.**

Thames and Hudson 2004. ISBN 0-500-51181-0

\$149.95 plus \$5.00 p&p from Touchwood Books.

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SUCCULENTS FOR DAMP PLACES

Brian Timms

(from a talk given at the Subtropicals Conference 2005)

I suspect that the old perception amongst gardeners that succulent plants had to be dry most of the time, if not all of it, has largely been dispelled by experience. Most of the succulent plants that are now quite commonly grown will put up with quite a lot of dampness underfoot - after all they will (usually) survive an Auckland winter. Succulents have evolved to deal with periodic dryness, not permanent, but our climate is backwards as far as they are concerned; most have cool dry winters and rain in spring or summer if at all. I have to admit that the title of this article is a bit misleading - you cannot grow them where you would grow ferns or carnivorous plants!

There are still a number of caveats. First and foremost, they will not handle permanently wet feet, especially not in winter when reduced temperatures mean slowing or cessation of growth. So some drainage is essential, and preferably as much as possible. On flat ground, on the horrid clays bequeathed us by the vanished rainforest, at least a couple of feet of fairly sharp drainage on top will allow survival of enough roots over winter. Of course, a good slope is better, but still don't plant in a hole in the ground, but if you have volcanic scoria you are very fortunate and have the best chance of success. In Hawai'i I saw succulents growing on volcanic soil at Hilo, with tremendous rainfall, and they were very happy (as was everything else--sigh!)

They must all have bright light and preferably full sunlight. We grow succulents primarily for their wonderful geometric shapes, spirals and angles, and to a lesser extent their colours, frequently blues and greys. In poor light they will become etiolated and lose their appeal.

Lastly, many succulent plants are armed, usually with spines or spikes of some sort, which can make for uncomfortable weeding and walking. Keep them away from the paths, especially if there are children around, and I advise a pebble mulch, both to suppress weeds and to reflect heat and light. As for landscaping, I'm preaching to the converted here I guess, but they look wonderful with palms, cycads, large rocks, grasses, bromeliads, and many flowering plants. Your imagination (and taste) is the limit really, although personally I'd draw the line at roses!

Let's have a look at some of the common groups. I have covered many of the possible species in other articles, especially 'Succulent Trees'. (see Volume 3, nos. 3 & 4)

CACTI

Most of the small cacti beloved of collectors will not survive outside in New Zealand, and those that do, usually look badly marked and scrawny, which is sad really, as many of the clustering mammillarias (for example) would look fantastic in a garden (viz. pictures of Huntington Gardens.) The exception is the famous 'Golden Barrel' cactus, *Echinocactus grusonii*, which for some odd reason seems perfectly happy and grows well, when all of its compatriots, and the related ferocacti, can struggle even in a glass-house. Try globular cacti if you have excellent heat, light, and drainage, but they hate our wet winters. The tall cacti, cereoids, and opuntias (Pad cacti) are a different story, and many do very well. (Vol. 3 nos. 3 & 4)

EUPHORBIAS

The succulent euphorbias seem to come in as many forms as all other succulent plants together. The shrubby, leafy, non-succulent euphorbias, such as *E lambii*, which have been grown for many years, don't fit our criteria for this article. There are many species grown by collectors in greenhouses, and many, many more that they would like to get. But relatively few will grow outside for us, mainly again because we get cold and wet together. But some forms work...

The medusa-head types will often grow outside, in some cases forming mats, as the arms will often root and form another head. I've had to weed them out but then typically lost the lot a year or two later.

The well-known 'Crown of Thorns', *E. mili* and related species have to be used with caution as they will take over, again rooting where branches touch the ground and forming a savage and potentially lethal thicket, albeit one with many and beautiful flowers (the sap of **ALL** euphorbias is very poisonous and will attack eyes and mucous membranes very painfully).

Many of the plants beloved of collectors form shrubs in the wild, from small and graceful to colossal and hideous (well, alright, very untidy). As a rule they are lovely as small potted specimens, when their details are clear, and also as a rule, outside only the new growth stays green and all the rest becomes a nasty and dead-looking brown or grey, spoiling them completely as garden plants. This seems to be caused mainly by cold. A typical example is the common Indian *E. trigona* in its green or red forms.

Most of the other forms are too rare or too touchy to even be considered for the garden. There are a number of larger plants occasionally available which do well enough in sheltered or very well-drained places.

Article continued in the spring issue

BLACK AS SIN

Edith McMillan

One of our members who works at a St. Lukes plant centre rang Grant Bayley to say that they had just received some very unusual plants that she had never seen before. They were in the early stages of flowering, cost \$40.00 each and were selling fast. If he wanted to photograph them he had better act quickly.

So Grant raced over and photographed the last two plants with difficulty – a plant centre is not the best lit and interesting of backdrops. They were very young plants, not fully open and at this stage the flowers were pale compared to a mature specimen.

So what was all the excitement about? With the problems the horticultural industry is having with MAF regulations, it isn't everyday that you see plants for sale that you have only previously seen in books like 'Exotic Perennials' by Stirling Macoboy. This small book published in 1991 is worth searching out, and perhaps it may be reprinted in the future as the interest in subtropical gardens continues to grow. The plant also appears in 'Tropical Flowering Plants' by Kirsten Albrecht Llamas who describes five species.

And what is this mysterious plant described as being as black as sin? ***Tacca chantrieri***, known as the 'Bat Flower' or 'Dracula-Flower'. This particular species of evergreen tuber is native to Thailand where it flowers from late winter to summer. (Incidentally, Macoboy describes this species as deciduous, summer-flowering and dying down in the winter while Albrecht Llamas says that while some may become dormant in the wild in dry seasons, with regular moisture they may remain evergreen) Who to believe? Only growing the plant will solve the riddle.

Taccas are mostly plants of the shady forest understorey so they need regular moisture with fertile, humus-rich, well-drained soil. The flower stems can be up to 60cm tall and need to be upright to show off the long appendages (whiskers?) to their best advantage. The leaves are attractive and heavily veined.

So if you are frost-free, have a warm, shady spot and would like a challenge why not risk it. The company that grew these plants are houseplant specialists and usually only sell in flower. They are, however, willing to supply them pre-flowering. Ask your local nursery to order one in for you – they may even be a little cheaper if not in flower. Something new and different can still be found but perhaps this is one plant that is being re-introduced.

COOL AND BLUE

Robin Booth

I have been lucky enough to be able to swap a *Worsleya* for some bulbs of a plant I had never seen before. It is not a subtropical plant, but comes from about two thousand metres plus in the high Andean mountains of Chile near Santiago. This beautiful winter-flowering bulb is called *Tecophilaea* and I was given three varieties: *T. cyanocrocus*, *T. cyanocrocus* var *leichtlinii* and *T. cyanocrocus* var *violacea*. The common name is Chilean Blue Crocus although they are not related to crocuses but belong to their own family, *Tecophilaeaceae*. There are two species in the genus. The other is *T. violiflora* which grows on the coastal ranges north of Santiago.

In 1950 *Tecophilaea cyanocrocus* was thought to have become extinct in the wild due to plant collectors and overgrazing by sheep and goats, but in 2001 a colony of plants was found. A breeder in New Zealand has been pollinating captive plants for many years and has been involved in getting them back to their homeland as well.

Tecophilaea are named after *Tecophilla Billiotti*, the daughter of an Italian botanist *Luigi Aloysius Colla* (1766 – 1848).

In Chile the bulbs start flowering as the snow melts but, here in Kerikeri, I have found that they start flowering in the second week of June and are still going strong. The narrow lance-shaped leaves, normally three in number, emerge from a corm and stand about 15cm high. One to two flower buds emerge from the centre of the leaves. The flower has a short stem, which allows it to grow a little higher than the leaves, and opens into a 5cm flat-faced flower which lasts for up to three weeks. The leaves die down in the spring and the corm is dormant over the summer. The plant prefers not too much moisture during its dormancy. Use a free draining-mix and some people recommend coarse sand as well as they grow naturally in amongst stones in gravelly soils.

Top left:

Two young plants of *Tacca chantrieri* at the plant centre with the flowers just starting to open.

Photo: Grant Bayley

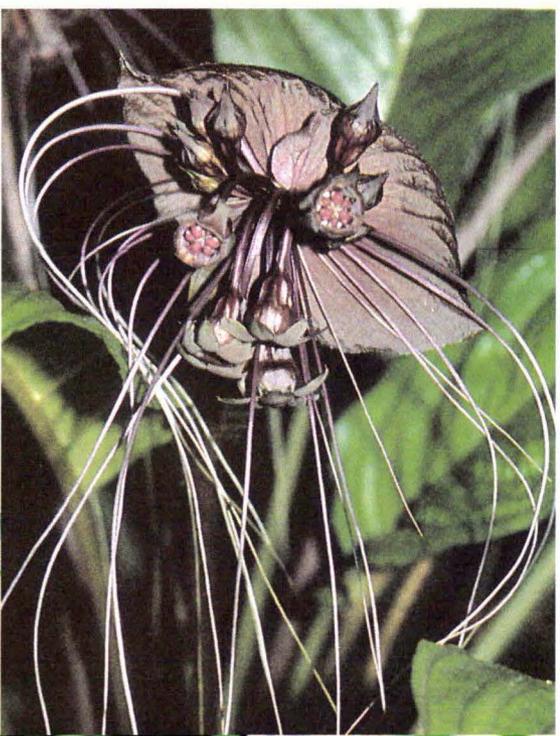
Top right: Flower fully open

Photo: Stirling Macoboy

Bottom:

Close-ups of the white and intense blue of *Tecophilaea* flowers

Photo: Robin Booth





MOUNTAIN HIGH MASDEVALLIAS

Jonathan Voysey

The orchid in the photograph opposite has been shot against a dark background and not in the garden because it was a wild, impulsive purchase made with no idea of where it was to go. As well, the man who sold it was doing it for someone else and had no knowledge of the plant or how it had been grown. At least it was correctly labelled as I discovered when I got it home and looked it up in my orchid books.

Masdevallia veitchiana has brilliant orange flowers overlaid with red that are some of the largest in the genus. Although most masdevallias are described as epiphytic or occasionally lithophytic, this particular species is described as growing terrestrially amongst rocks at about 3300-4000 metres in the Peruvian Andes. In Ross Macdonald's excellent book, 'Cool Flowering Orchids throughout the year' he says 'the flowers are produced several times during the year and the flowering lasts for about two months'.

Deciduous leaves usually indicate that the orchid needs a dry period during the year, usually winter, which is virtually impossible in our climate if the plants are being grown outside in the garden. So attractive evergreen leaves; a need for year round moisture; the need for cooler conditions than many orchids and some wonderful colours to some of the species make this genus a natural for the cooler parts of the subtropical garden. The succinct advice of an orchid expert was 'grow it cool, moist and shady'.

I am enjoying the flowers inside although, like cyclamen, this is probably not good for the plant. I have just the spot so, shortly, my unplanned purchase will move outside to be grown in a 50cm high hollowed out ponga trunk where it can be seen to best advantage flowering 'several times a year'.

Photo: Grant Bayley

The Palm & Cycad Society of New Zealand

meets on the first Tuesday of each month excepting January.

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Ruellia macrantha

William Platt

Although the Southern Hemisphere *Ruellia macrantha* comes from Brazil and Venezuela, its common name in the Northern Hemisphere is 'Christmas Pride' (another misnomer) as it flowers in winter and early spring.

In its native habitat in the Sierra de Perija Mountains, *R. macrantha* grows on the forest margins in sun and part shade. Here it receives plenty of air movement while being protected from strong winds and frost. Recommended minimum temperatures vary from 5°C to 10°C (frost tender) and it is thought grow best in Zone 10 in mild conditions. High temperatures cause it to wilt. Not surprising as it is a soft-stemmed, evergreen shrub or sub-shrub that needs year round moisture to succeed. Well drained, fertile soil with an acid pH complete the requirements.

The magenta-pink flowers (photo on previous page) are quite large and quietly showy against the heavily veined leaves, on an upright plant that grows up to two metres high. This is not a long-lasting shrub and many choose to propagate it from spring cuttings each year, pinching regularly to bush it up before the winter flowering season. If you prune it back to prevent straggling, do so straight after flowering to ensure blooms for the following season.

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.

Our advisory members will endeavour to supply solutions and answers.

Write, fax or email to

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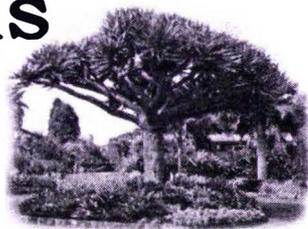
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LETTER FROM THE ELLERSLIE FLOWER SHOW

The Ellerslie Flower Show, now under new, dynamic management, is dedicated to ensuring that there is a core focus on plants and flowers throughout the Show.

Already steps have been taken to bring to the Show as many as possible of the Horticultural and Floral Art Clubs and Societies of New Zealand.

“We have consulted widely with many of our partners and realize that there is a need to re-engage with the thousands of people in the country who are dedicated to their real passion – horticulture. Having a presence at the Show will afford the opportunity for all the Horticultural Clubs and Societies to solicit new members and showcase their work at the same time. We are also happy to discuss ideas as to how the Show can assist with fund generation for those clubs and societies attending. The Show is a fantastic mechanism for educating visitors who are thirsty for knowledge, especially when it comes to new and unusual plants.

It is an exciting time for the Ellerslie Flower Show, and to be told that we may need a bigger marquee is excellent news” explains Damian Cooper, the Exhibitor Manager for the Ellerslie Flower Show. “I have been invited to address the Auckland Horticultural Society AGM on the 29th May and look forward to taking any questions about the Show”.

This year’s event will take place from the 16th to the 20th November at the Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens, Manurewa, Manukau City, Auckland.

For more information, please contact
Damian Cooper
Exhibitor Manager
(09) 309-7875 or damian@ellerslieflowershow.co.nz

Because of all the problems we have had with this issue, the above letter needs updating. Yes, the **SUBTROPICALS** Society will be at Ellerslie with a display called ‘**from the beach to the bush**’ to indicate the scope of the society’s coverage and, yes, we hope to interest visitors to the Ellerslie Flower Show in the benefits of joining the society.

WHAT PLANT IS THAT?

Georgie Gardner of Ruakaka has sent us these two photographs in the hope that one of our members might possibly recognise the plant and be able to identify it for her.

Even a guess might be helpful, so send your suggestions to Subtropicals, PO Box 91-728 Auckland, 1030, phone/fax (09) 376-6874 or email marlowe@subtropicals.co.nz

LAST, LONELIEST?

Well maybe not the loneliest as Piha Beach is not the quietest place during the swimming season. Last June, in midwinter, Grant Bayley photographed this testimony to the incredible survival abilities of some plants. Alongside a track to the beach, it is a wonder that it was not trampled to death. Growing high up the beach in the dunes, this clump of the common gazania is in full flower with many buds yet to open.

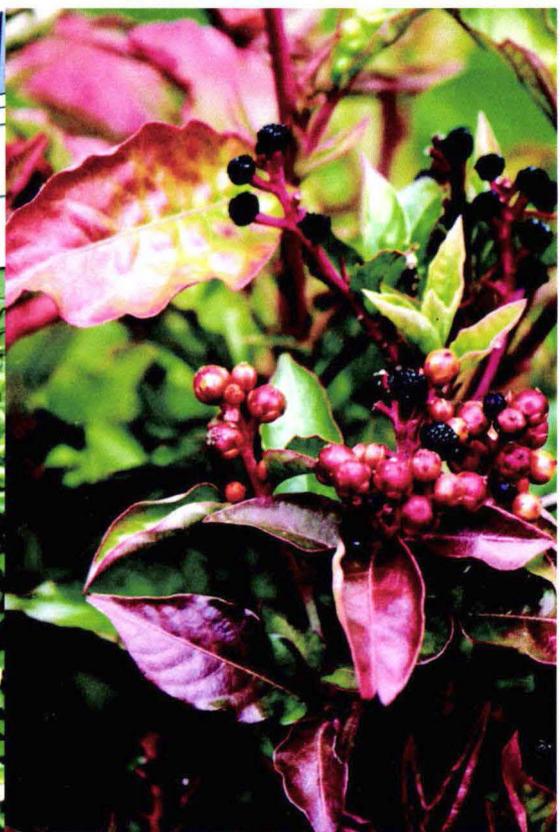
This is fast drainage indeed, not to mention the intense heat coming from the black sand in summer. Full sun and a sandy soil containing compost in a temperate climate are the recommended growing instructions, with the note that these are salt resistant plants and flower in spring and early summer. I don't think that this plant reads garden books.

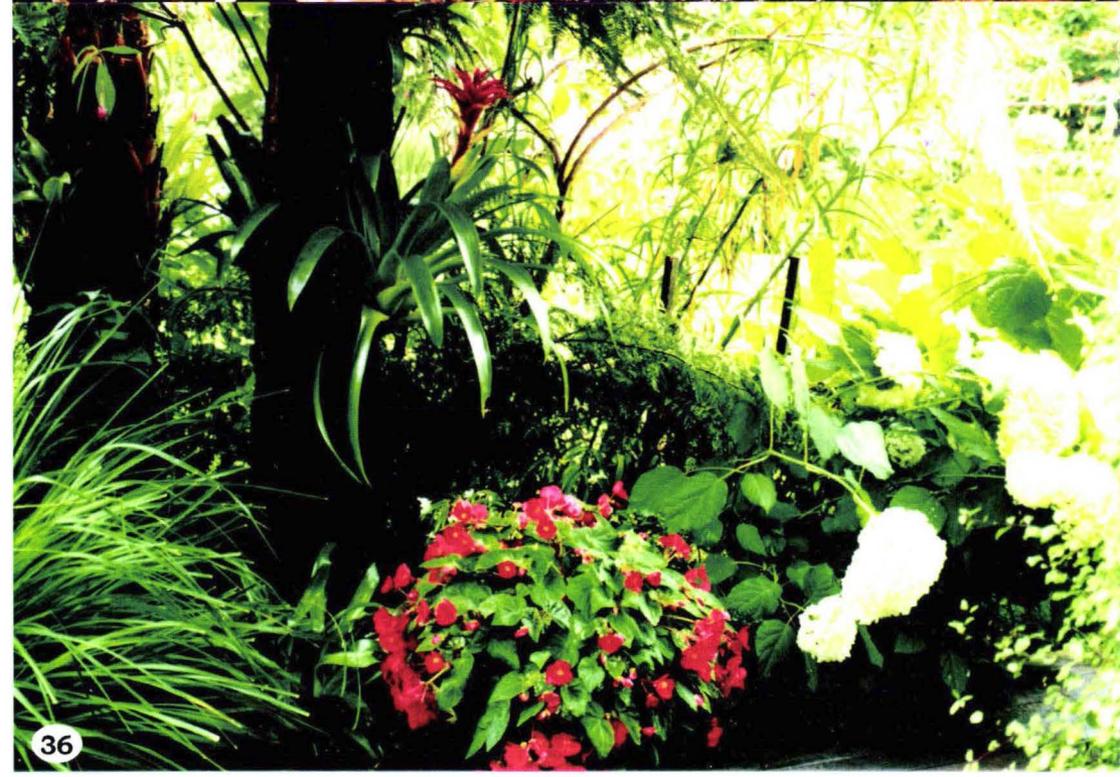
The question is, how did it arrive? Wind blown? Bird droppings? An unlikely garden escapee? Whatever, this plant (not a weed), deserves a salute from all of us for its response to adversity. Long may it live!

TAKE NOTE

As the weather improves and the rain stops (hopefully) we hope to have many more entries for the Touchwood Books letter and photograph competition.

All entries published win a \$50.00 book voucher from Touchwood Books and help to bring a personal touch to the magazine. This competition and the annual Plant Fair and Conference are our way of keeping in touch with our members. Gardeners all love anecdotes and photos of the successes (and difficulties faced) of other enthusiasts. Keep the entries coming!





LETTER/PHOTO COMPETITION

And the winner of the \$50.00 Touchwoods Books voucher is Judy Graham of Waiuku.

Judy moved from a larger property in Tuakau with as many of her much-loved plants as she could manage and has been toiling away ever since. As you can see, although we only had room for two of her photographs, her garden is already becoming established. Like her Tuakau garden, she experiences occasional frosts and is expert at rushing out with frostcloth to protect the plants. As the canopy matures this should be less necessary. (Just look at that guzmania in the bottom photograph!)

The other photographs will be used in later issues.

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AUSTRALIAN SOJOURN

Brian Timms

Recently I visited family in Perth and, although my brother claimed that the climate is similar to Auckland's, it was obvious from one glance at the gardens that this was not the case. Golden Cane (*Dypsis lutescens*) and Triangle (*Dypsis decaryi*) palms are common garden plants in Perth. Both are difficult, if not quite impossible, to grow outdoors in Auckland. There are, of course, many exotic palms that will grow here but most of these are mountain plants such as the chamaedoreas.

But what was really exciting to me, was to see both cycads and Grass trees growing in their native habitat both in and around the city. The Grass tree was named in the Botanic Gardens as *Xanthorrhoea priessii* and there were thousands of them on every bit of uncleared land, even roadside verges. Most were small, but there were occasional multiple-headed trees. We counted up to six heads and these were just the ones visible from the car. They were also on offer in at least one plant shop as rescued plants from land clearance – from fifty to a hundred dollars! Most had been burnt and they seem to need this. This species is occasionally available here but seems to grow very slowly.

The cycads were even more exciting and just as common. The local West Australian cycads were all named *Macrozamia riedlei* for many years, but have now been split up into several species, with *M. fraseri* just to the north of Perth, *M. riedlei* on the south coast and, ironically, an unnamed species in the area between (where I was). There are about three others from Western Australia.

These cycads are medium sized, with dull green leaves up to 1.8 metres long, but I saw none with trunks, although *M. fraseri* can have one several metres high. I also saw one or two cycads that were quite different, with grey-blue leaves that seemed broader and less pointed, but alas in a fast-moving car (with no other cycad fans), there was little time to ponder. These cycads, like the Grass trees, were everywhere there was uncultivated ground, although there were none in thick forest.

Both of the named species are occasionally available in Auckland, but how well they will do here depends on your micro-climate. I know that *M. communis* does well here but the western macrozamia species seem to need more warmth and are apparently susceptible to *Phytophthora* unless very well drained.

Good luck!

WHAT'S ON

OCTOBER

Saturday 29TH Sunday 30TH 10am to 4pm
Bromeliad Society of New Zealand
Spring Show, novice competition and plant sale
Milford Primary School, Shakespeare Road, Milford

NOVEMBER -

Friday 4TH, Saturday 5TH, Sunday 6TH
Whangarei Garden Discovery
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info@gardendiscovery.org.nz or check website
www.gardendiscovery.org.nz

Sunday 6TH 9am to 4pm
Sarcochilus Orchid Show
Eden Garden, 24 Omana Avenue, Epsom

Wednesday to Sunday 16TH / 20TH
Ellerslie Flower Show
Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens, Manurewa

Friday to Sunday 18TH/20TH
Tenth New Zealand Herb Conference
Waipuna Hotel & Conference Centre, Panmure Auckland
(09) 630-1407 email - coxyl@clear.net.nz

Saturday 26th
Auckland Horticultural Council
Annual Sweet Pea Show
990 Gt. North Road, Western Springs

DECEMBER

Sunday 8TH 2pm to 4pm
Christmas Floral Feasts
Landsend, 108 Parker Road, Oratia.

SUBTROPICALS Society
ANNUAL CONFERENCE & PLANT FAIR
SATURDAY & SUNDAY - MAY 27TH 28TH 2006

PLANT SOURCES for this issue

***Aechmea distichantha* –**

Landsendt, Oratia, Auckland

Exotica, Warkworth

***Aechmea recurvata* varieties and hybrids**

Greens Bromeliads, Maungakaramea

Exotica, Warkworth

Joy Plants, Pukekohe

***Alcantarea imperialis* -**

Greens Bromeliads, Maungakaramea

Exotica, Warkworth

Landsendt, Oratia

Alpinias -

Specialist - Russell Fransham, Matapouri Bay

Some species - Nestlebrae Exotics, Helensville, Plantet Earth, Taupaki, Auckland, Landsendt

***Casimaroa edulis* –**

Nestlebrae Exotics, Helensville

Russell Fransham, Matapouri Bay

***Clerodendrum x speciosum* –**

Lake Ngatu Plantations, Kaitaia email tropicngatu@xtra.co.nz

***Cycas taitungensis* –**

The Palm Farm, 119 Walmsley Road, Mangere

Email – info@palmfarm.co.nz

***Davallia mariesii* var. *stenolepis* -**

Houseplant section at plant centres – failing that the editor will give you a piece to grow on

***Linospadix monostachya* -**

Muddy Thumbs, 316 Henderson Valley Road (09) 838-8572

Masdevallias –

Pottering About, Whakatane,

Tuckers Orchid Nursery (09) 445-6692 - Mob 0274-971-820

or check out orchid society sales

***Pyrostegia venusta* –**

Available from most nurseries

***Ruellia macrantha* –**

Lake Ngatu Plantations, Kaitaia

Houseplant section in nurseries

***Tacca chantrieri* –**

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***Tecophilaeas* –**

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BACK COVER STORY

Edith McMillan

Clerodendrum x speciosum

Hybrid Glory-Bower Vine

One of the problems with selecting a climber (creeper, vine or scrambler) is that so many of them are very vigorous, not to say rampant. This is an important aspect of survival for those plants that must climb to the top of the canopy to reach life-giving sunshine. But for the gardener it can mean constant pruning to keep the plant from taking over.

The choice of attractive, especially subtropical, small vines is not large so it was great to find one new to me at the **SUBTROPICALS** Plant Fair. Unnamed, it was obvious when looking at it that *Clerodendrum thomsoniae* (Bleeding-Heart) from Central western Africa, had to be a relation. Instead of inflated white calyces with red flowers in spring/summer it had white calyces quickly turning to magenta with bright red flowers, an unusual combination.

Although this small, shrubby climber (it needs encouragement to climb) was originally collected in Rarotonga, it turned out to be a hybrid of two African clerodendrum climbers – *C. thomsoniae* and *C. splendens*, a winter/spring bloomer from tropical Africa. Identification was made from that invaluable book 'Tropical Flowering Plants' by Kirsten Albrecht Llamas.

She says that *C. x speciosum* is evergreen in zones 10-11 and flowers in autumn, winter and spring. Obviously a warm, protected position in full to part sun is necessary for satisfactory growth but the thought of such cheerful colour in winter is very enticing. A specimen planted in a rather exposed position just north of Kaitaia, loses its leaves in winter but comes away in spring when it warms up and presumably has a different flowering time.

Like the Bat-flower on page 27, this is another exotic plant to experiment with and invaluable for those with limited space and warm positions – a valuable courtyard addition.

Photo: Peter Enticott

• The actual size of the flowers is approximately half that of the blow-up on the back cover.

and now for another colourful climber

The Brazilian Flame Vine, *Pyrostegia venusta*, on the other hand is known to most mild climate gardeners. As long as you like orange, it is the most stunning of winter (anytime between late autumn and early spring) flowering plants. Its impact can be as great as a well-grown bougainvillea. Some years ago, Beryl te Wiata was living in a two storey house in Epsom. She had trained pyrostegia to cover the entire façade – an unbelievable sight and never forgotten.

Unlike the clerodendrum, the Brazilian Flame vine if untouched can become a very big plant so it is best to train it from the beginning, tip-pinching, rather than wait until it becomes unmanageable. Because it is a woody climber some of the stems look dead – I have pruned out what I thought was dead wood only to find that growth further along was very much alive. Although described as evergreen, I find that it loses quite a few leaves in spring, mostly low down leaving the base of the plant fairly bare. As *P. venusta* is best in full sun with its roots in shade I overcome this by base planting with variegated iresene.

Hardier than you might think, when established it will stand some frost. If damaged, as long as the frost was not too hard, the vine will spring back quite rapidly. A good plant for coastal situations it is salt tolerant and when mature will stand moderately dry conditions.

• the attractive inflorescence in seed to the right of the photograph is *Cordyline kaspar*, from the Three Kings Islands. The purple/blue and white ripening seed on one metre long branches stays looking good for months. When *C. australis*, the common cabbage tree, starts to flower in early October, *C. kaspar* is still holding these branches from the previous year.

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By featuring new, different and hard to find plants, improving the layout and appeal of the stands and generally making the stadium an interesting space, we hope each year to increase the numbers who attend. This year there were several groups who travelled some distance to the show and quite a number of people for whom it was their third buying sortie.

The door prize was won by Heather Shingles, one of our members. She was surprised and highly delighted. We gained new members as did the other societies who were there. Lastly, the society benefits from the entry fee which has paid for the new computer equipment and helps to support the magazine.

Editor



