The background image is a vibrant, close-up photograph of a tropical forest. It features several large, broad green leaves with prominent veins, some with yellowish-green edges. Interspersed among the leaves are small clusters of white flowers. The overall composition is lush and green.

Spring  
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.

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SPRING

Volume 4 Number 3

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SUMMER ISSUE  
COPY DEADLINE

All copy must be received by the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2005

## THE DOMINO EFFECT

When a deadline is missed, all the following deadlines go down also, just like those domino setups where hundreds are lined up and by touching one all the rest go down.

This issue celebrates the change of direction taken at Wharepuke by Robin Booth. Robin is a foundation member of **SUBTROPICALS** and a regular contributor of articles and photographs. He also has given informative talks at the annual conferences. We wish him well in the new venture.

This issue features rather more foliage than usual but reflects the changing interests of gardeners who are finding that leaves are possibly as important as flowers. Some of the foliage plants are as colourful as flowers and last a great deal longer. The wonderful textures and forms that can be found in leaves that range in size from minute to enormous are fascinating. And so far we have only scratched the surface of the subject.

Winter was much warmer for most people than last year, although not as warm as a few years ago when my average minimum temperature for both June and July was 12.1°C. The article on page 33 gives some words of warning about our cool, wet springs.

**Marjorie Lowe**  
**Editor**

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# **FRONT COVER STORY**

## **WHAREPUKE – A CHANGE OF DIRECTION**

Robin Booth has been at his present site in Kerikeri since 1993 and has been planting and developing the nearly two hectares steadily ever since. Running a nursery, particularly one that specialises in and sources edible and decorative subtropical plants, is a major undertaking and does not leave a great deal of time for the indulgence of serious gardening.

With other early enthusiasts in tropical and subtropical plants such as the Austen brothers from Kaitaia, the late Os Blumhart, Whangarei, the Endts, Oratia, the Enticotts, Awanui, Russell Fransham, Whangarei and now Matapouri Bay and of course the Hatches, Pukekohe, Robin has been instrumental in extending and broadening the range of plants that we now know are possible to grow in our climate.

For these specialists (and others) it has involved various activities – collecting in the wild, searching out both seed and cuttings of unusual plants, importing new material (well once upon a time) and breeding new varieties. Plant material has been swapped freely and tested for suitability and vigour. In the last ten years or so, we gardeners have been able to choose plants for our gardens from an ever increasing variety. The range of palms and subtropical fruits has been especially enhanced, with aroids, gingers, succulents and now heliconias close behind.

---

### **Front cover:**

**Looking across to the steps and path that lead to the top of the ridge. The very large pleated leaves at the top of the photograph belong to a *Ficus dammaropsis*. The colour in the foreground is a small *Musa velutina* and the three flower spikes in the distance are *vriesea* hybrids. (see close-up on page 28).**

### **Inside front cover:**

#### **Top:**

**The deck that surrounds the function venue looks out and over the verdant and vigorous plantings.**

#### **Bottom:**

**The band playing to entertain guests at the official opening at Labour weekend.**

**Photos: Robin Booth**

And the changes? The range of plants that Robin grows will be more limited but still interesting. This will leave much more time for developing the garden and completing projects like the sunken dry-climate garden for which many interesting succulents have been collected. There are many trees and shrubs at Wharepuke, now starting to reach a reasonable size, that are either rare in this country or the only ones in cultivation here.

Wharepuke Subtropical Garden has been open for garden visits for some years and a special feature has been the guided tours that Robin conducts – these take approximately two hours and are a source of invaluable information for anyone interested in gaining greater knowledge about subtropical gardening. Photographs in gardening books often do not indicate the size and form of many plants. Seeing a mature plant in a garden setting makes it much easier to make choices that will avoid wasting time and money. Another advantage is that this is an all-year garden worth visiting in every season. So many gardens are designed to be at their peak in the warmer months and are unappealing the rest of the year. Not so with Wharepuke – there is always colour (and often scent) and wonderful combinations of foliage.

The garden is now listed with the New Zealand Gardens Trust on their website at <http://www.gardens.org.nz/gardens>

The old Lynfield Hall from Auckland has been moved onto the site and renovated for use as a venue for exhibitions, talks, lectures, functions, poetry readings, screenings, music, private parties and various community groups. There is a print making studio with drawing and painting classes in the gardens and evening and weekend courses and workshops. Horticultural courses will be run as well.

Robin's partner, Honey Anderson, and Aida Booth (CINZ trained) run the catering from a commercial kitchen using produce from the garden. This is complemented by an outdoor wood-fired pizza oven.

Six self-contained holiday units are being built for those attending classes or conferences or for those who would just like a peaceful holiday in beautiful subtropical surroundings. These are due to be available from this summer on.

What an interesting way to retire although I suspect that Robin and Honey will be as busy, or even busier, than ever. This is a great way to ensure that this garden with its wonderful collection of uncommon and unusual plants will be used and appreciated by many people for a long time to come.

**WEBSITE:** [www.sub-tropicals.co.nz](http://www.sub-tropicals.co.nz)

# BAUHINIA SPECIES

## Russell Fransham

The genus Bauhinia, named after the sixteenth century French botanist brothers Bauhin, consists of about two hundred and fifty species world-wide of subtropical and tropical trees, shrubs and scrambling vines. These are characterised by twin-lobed leaves, shaped like a butterfly's wings, and have somewhat orchid-like, scented flowers. In the tropics the flowering period (some are everblooming) is often the winter dry season when the trees are bare. In New Zealand, because our winters and springs are wet, the flowers arrive while the trees are in leaf. Many bauhinia species are fairly hardy in northern New Zealand and the most popular species here are also some of the most florally impressive.

***Bauhinia purpurea*** is from Southern Asia, where it is commonly planted as a street tree. It is a graceful, small tree growing to five metres. It has arching slender branches with pendulous, terminal clusters of 10cm purplish-pink flowers in autumn. Initially lanky, it becomes bushy with age. Severe cutting back will induce bushy growth earlier and therefore more flowers. It is very hardy and fast-growing here in Northland, with attractively red-veined leaves.

I collected the seed in Bali seven years ago and, as there seemed to be no literature identifying it anywhere, I sold it under this name. Recently I found a named specimen in the Darwin Botanical Gardens. It is a highly variable species from white through every shade of pink and red to purplish flowers, 7.5-10cm wide.

For me, *B. purpurea* usually flowers in autumn, from late February to late May, but this year, after a two month break, mine started flowering again in late July. At present it is very showy - heavily in flower and carrying plenty of buds yet to open. It would appear that flowering will continue until summer arrives.

***B. variegata***, from India, is very similar to *B. purpurea* but flowers in spring and has wider, overlapping petals. In a dry year the leaves drop revealing the massed flowers, but more often in New Zealand winter and spring are wet, and the leaves remain on the tree obscuring and diminishing the flower display.

In cultivation, many bauhinias sold as *B. purpurea* are probably hybrids between these two species and exhibit a wide colour variation from white (*B. variegata* 'Candida') through every shade of pink to purplish red.

**B. x blakeana** (Hong Kong Orchid Tree) is almost certainly a hybrid between *B. purpurea* and *B. variegata* with larger (10-12.5cm), darker flowers than either parent. The spectacular terminal panicles of flowers are lightly perfumed and in the tropics this one flowers almost continuously, although here it flowers from late summer till early spring. It is the national symbol of Hong Kong and is a popular street tree throughout the tropics. Being a sterile hybrid it can only be grown from cuttings, which need to be of quite large diameter - at least 12mm and preferably over 15mm. Still fairly rare in New Zealand, this hardy hybrid grows rapidly and makes a lush, handsome specimen growing to about five metres.

**B. galpinii** is a South African native and, from February to May, has bright orange flower clusters along the tops of the arching horizontal branches, above the foliage. It is a handsome, sprawling, layered shrub in full sun but in the shade will scramble through other trees to reach the light. In New Zealand it is winter deciduous and hardy to light frost but in the tropics is virtually evergreen. Regular pruning back during winter dormancy will keep this plant shapely and free-flowering.

**B. acuminata** is a small shrubby plant that grows to about one and a half metres. It has beautiful white 5cm flowers but, coming from Thailand, it is more tropical (Thailand) and needs more careful treatment to thrive here.

**B. monandra** is a beautiful tree species from tropical America, three to four metres in height, with pale pink petals speckled with burgundy and one bright yellow and red petal. I have not seen this in New Zealand, but it seems as hardy as *B. purpurea* in Australia.

These seven species are among the hardest in cultivation in my experience. Although many other shrubby and vining species will grow here, their flower displays tend to be either more ephemeral or simply less visually impressive. Good drainage, full sun and some shelter from wind and hard frost will suit most bauhinias. The majority of them grow very vigorously and flower within a couple of years of planting. Apart from *B. blakeana*, they are generally grown from seed although variability is high among the hybridised types.

---

**Top left: *Bauhinia blakeana***

**Top right: *Bauhinia galpinii***

**Bottom right: *Bauhinia variegata***

**Bottom left: *Bauhinia purpurea***

**Photos: Russell Fransham**





## ***Begonia solananthera***

### **Jonathan Voysey**

Depending on which book you read (and there are very few on the subject), the *Begonia* genus has from 900 to over 2000 species and several thousand hybrids. Apart from the tuberous begonias, this is a much neglected genus. Our high humidity and good rainfall make them suitable for many places in the garden and their often beautiful foliage and everblooming habits (some) are prime reasons for growing them.

*B. solananthera* is an evergreen, fibrous-rooted plant that belongs to a small group of begonias that are trailing and/or scandent. In its native Brazil it flowers in winter and spring but here it flowers from November onwards. Like most begonias it is shallow rooted and is usually grown as a hanging basket plant in shade. It would be interesting to see if it could be encouraged to climb. Very small climbers are rare. The leaves are shiny and nearly heart-shaped and, with some tip pinching, the plant will soon fill a hanging basket.

What sets this plant apart from most other begonias is that it is scented – a fresh apple scent reminiscent of the briar roses that used to grow wild by the roadside in Henderson when I was a child.

## ***Calathea louisae***

For many years calatheas were deemed to be so tropical that they could only be grown in a glasshouse or as a houseplant. But gardeners started experimenting and found that this was only partly true. When one sees a mature *Calathea zebrina* at least 1.5m wide growing outdoors (photo vol.2, no 1), rethinking is indicated.

The calathea opposite is *C. louisae* from Brazil, photographed growing alongside a path in a Mt. Eden garden. Under a tree canopy, this clump is surrounded by anthuriums, many different aroids, orchids, small palms and hardier foliage plants such as bergenias and farfugiums. It is the leaves that are the feature of this plant but the flowers are quietly attractive at close quarters.

In its native habitat of moist forest and alongside streams, it is used to high humidity, regular rainfall and the compost that results from rapidly decaying vegetation. Replicate these conditions (slow-release fertiliser is useful) and if you are frost-free, protected from cold winds and willing to mist occasionally in summer, then you can begin to experiment with the less tender calatheas.

# **EDIBLE GINGERS**

**Russell Fransham**

Most of the world's important culinary gingers can be grown here and are available from specialist nurseries. I covered Galangal ginger (*Alpinia galanga*), False Cardamom (*Alpinia calcarata*) and the true cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*) in the article on alpinias in the last issue. The following are the more common edible zingibers.

Surprisingly easy to grow is the common supermarket ginger, **Zingiber officinale**. Sprouting rhizomes should be planted shallowly in rich, loose, garden soil in spring. This ginger grows to about 90cm tall through the summer and has slender deciduous stems with narrow light-green leaflets.

I have found that it grows very well in dappled light in the vegetable garden among the chillies and tomatoes. In March it sends up green cone-like flower spikes like all the zingibers. These produce ephemeral white florets for some weeks before the entire plant collapses for the winter. Being deciduous means that, as long as the soil is warm through the growing season, it will grow well and survive frosty winters.

The edible rhizome is at its best for culinary use through the autumn and early winter but can be harvested for home use throughout the year by scratching away the soil and slicing off the required amount. Store the harvested rhizome by wrapping it in Glad Wrap and keep it in the pantry, not the refrigerator.

The Japanese **Myoga ginger, Zingiber mioga**, is an indispensable part of my vegetable garden. Myoga is deciduous and vigorous, growing to about 80cm high in expanding clumps in loose, well-manured soil.

There are new shoots in spring and flower buds which emerge from the soil from February to May. These are delicious, tender and delicately flavoured vegetables for salads, tempura and stir-fries. They are also beautiful with lightly poached fish with early garlic, lemon grass, coriander and lime-juice.

The buds are best picked as they start to emerge from the soil, before the first flower opens. The vigour of myoga requires some confinement or root barrier to stop it taking over the vegetable garden, but its productivity warrants the effort.

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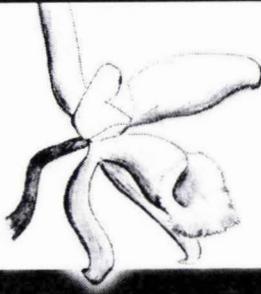
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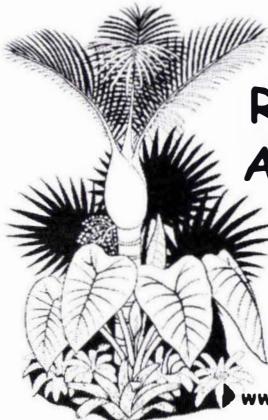
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## **THE SNAIL VINE**

**Edith McMillan**

Closely related to culinary beans (*Phaseolus*), the genus *Vigna* includes the Mung bean used for bean sprouts and other beans used in Asian cooking. Like them, the beans produced by ***Vigna caracalla***, are edible (as is onion weed, and a perfect way to get rid of it is to eat it!)

*V. caracalla* (syn *Phaseolus caracalla*, *P. hertonii*) is a relatively short-lived, evergreen perennial vine from tropical America that is deciduous in cooler areas. The Snail Vine in the photograph is growing in Papatoetoe, Auckland where it loses its leaves in winter but comes away quickly in spring. Frosted to the ground it will still recover if the frost is not too severe. In late spring and summer it produces fascinating and unusual flowers that have been described as 'collapsed sweet peas'. These vary in colour from cream marked with reddish-purple to lavender and are notable for their attraction to bees and their strong perfume (stronger at dusk and in the early morning), which wafts through the garden.

Often found in older gardens, it is most useful for disguising unappealing garden sheds as it is a vigorous grower and will succeed in sun to dappled shade. Where it is evergreen it can be used as a groundcover. Propagation is usually by seed so don't eat all the beans.

### **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**

**Q & A**

**PO Box 91-728, Auckland, 1030**

**Phone/fax (09) 376-6874**

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# THE PASSIONFRUIT TREE

## Rosemary Steele

*Passiflora lindeniana* is an anomaly: unlike virtually all of the 480 or so species of the genus, it is not a climber but a tree. Originating in Venezuela, it grows to eight metres with handsome oblong-ovate leaves 20-24.5cm long and 11-15cm wide. From April to May, it bears clusters of two to five flowers hanging on slender peduncles from the axils of its leaves. Each flower is 50-60mm in diameter, white, with deep yellow corona filaments and a pleasant scent.

We have two trees at 'Nestlebrae', now approximately eight years old. One formed flower buds last year which then fell, unopened, after a cold snap. This year we have had many flowers open. They appear to be self-incompatible but I have been lucky enough to get pollen from a friend's tree and hope that my attempts at cross-pollination will be successful. According to John Vanderplank, holder of the National Passiflora Collection in the United Kingdom and author of "Passion flowers", the fruit should be ovoid, 5-5.5cm long and 2.5-3cm wide, greenish yellow and reddish when ripe.

These handsome trees are now extremely rare in their natural habitat in the mountains of Venezuela. John Vanderplank says, 'Less than six mature trees are known in the wild at this time, and these could so easily disappear for firewood overnight'. Fortunately seed has been available for some years and we obtained our plants from the friend mentioned above. He has two growing outside and ours are under light shade in our growing house. All have reached a similar height (approximately four metres). At the moment (early May) we each have one tree with fresh new growth bearing flowers and one tree which flushed in spring without flowering. There is no obvious reason for this difference as both of the two pairs are growing in close proximity with equal care, water, etc. so we can only think the seeds came from two different accessions.

So far I have been unable to propagate it from cuttings so am anxiously hoping that my pollination is successful as I believe that *Passiflora lindeniana* has great merit as a garden plant and it deserves to be more widely grown.

---

**Top: *Vigna caracalla***

**Photo – John Hague-Smith**

**Bottom: *Passiflora lindeniana* P**

**Photo: Rosemary Steele**





# FOLIAGE PLANTS – one tender, one hardy

## William Platt

### ***Strobilanthes dyerianus***

Probably one of the most beautiful foliage plants one could wish for is *Strobilanthes dyerianus*, a humid-tropical, evergreen shrub from Myanmar (Burma). The iridescent leaves are rich purple and silver on top and purple underneath. In their native habitat or well fed in a heated, moist glasshouse, the leaves can grow to 20cm in length.

Persian Shield is hard to photograph because the purple of the leaves tends to come out more pink than purple, even allowing for plant variation. The photo opposite was taken by Robin Booth in Kerikeri and was the most accurate in colour.

Despite its tropical origins, *S. dyerianus* will grow outdoors and remain evergreen in the north in warm, sheltered, frost free positions in fertile soil (with the addition of nitrogenous fertilisers), with plenty of summer water and good drainage. That said, there are provisos.

The beauty of the plant is in the new leaves that start coming from early December on. As the weather warms up the leaves increase in size and brilliance but of course are smaller than in the tropics. When the weather starts to cool down in autumn, new leaves are no longer produced and the plant, while still in leaf, looks rather scraggly through winter and spring. So placement is very important if you are growing it in the ground. An alternative is to grow it in a pot where you can control food and water and hide it somewhere warm, out of sight, in the off-season (for cooler areas this is essential).

**Warning!** As well as being beautiful the leaves are obviously delicious. The culprits in this case are bright green and fat (as on coleus) and/or tiny caterpillars that can ruin a plant quite quickly, so preventive measures are absolutely essential.

### ***Farfugium gigantea***

(syn. *Ligularia reniformis*)

Another wonderful foliage plant, but this time the interest lies in the glossiness and shape of the leaves. So many garden plants have strap or sword-shaped leaves that a variation in texture and form is very desirous. Robin Booth, who promoted this plant, tells me that it was first sold as *Ligularia reniformis* because of the shape of the leaves, but has now been identified as *F. gigantea*. At one stage the evergreen farfugiums were renamed ligularias (which all appear to be deciduous) but have now been returned to their former name. Some nurseries still sell farfugiums as ligularias.

It is probably the largest of the farfugiums, hence the name, and makes large clumps about one metre high and more across. The flower stems rise well above the leaves and carry bright yellow daisy-like blooms in autumn (some gardeners prefer to remove these).

The close-up of the leaves in the photograph shows their handsome form and texture and was taken at Joy Plants, Pukekohe. Here *F. gigantea* grows in clumps under large trees where they compete for food and moisture. So the usual recommendation for rich soil, reasonable moisture and high humidity does not always apply. Hardy to at least -5°C, this a great plant to give a subtropical feeling to cooler area gardens.

Dying leaves need to be removed if they cannot be concealed by other plants and a **Warning – beware of slugs and snails!**

## WHAT'S ON

### FEBRUARY

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# BOOK REVIEW

## BEGONIAS OF PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

By Ruth Kiew

### Reviewed By Nick Miller

This splendid hard-cover book was produced in 2005. It is another from the stable of Natural History Publications (Borneo), a firm which specialises in producing high-quality books on the flora, fauna, history and ethnography of the South-East Asia region. The author, Dr Ruth Kiew, is currently Keeper of the Herbarium and Library and Assistant Director of Botanical Research at the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Born in Cambridge (U.K) she has spent over thirty years working on the forests of Malaysia. During that time begonias have been one of her particular interests.

There are so few books on begonias available that each one of them is deserving of attention. This is more deserving than most, despite its specialised nature. The book examines the fifty-four begonia species (including two garden escapes from South America) that are known from the Malaysian Peninsula, in close detail. This is a botanical treatise, but is relieved from any possibility of being dry and academic by the numerous superb photographs of plants and their habitats. Excellent watercolour paintings and botanical illustrations complement the more than three hundred photographs.

Many of the species illustrated are confined to very restricted localities, and it is important that they enter general cultivation before their habitats are destroyed by logging, agricultural development, tourist development and the other pressures that exist in a densely populated country. A couple of species have not been seen, alive, for a number of years and are thus represented by paintings and illustrations made from herbarium specimens.

A number of the species described and illustrated would be great additions to our plant collections and (for those species from higher altitudes) gardens. Of particular magnificence are *Begonia jiewhoei* (a wonderfully handsome species named after the plant enthusiast who funded the publication of this book), *B. kingiana*, *B. ignorata*, *B. integrifolia*, *B. variabilis*, *B. decora*, *B. koksunii*, *B. rajah* and *B. pavonina* (the Peacock begonia, with leaves that are iridescent blue under some lighting conditions). But these are just a few selected from many fine species. Tantalisingly, the postscript mentions that a number of new species almost certainly await discovery, particularly

in the Cameron Highlands and the Main Range of peninsular Malaysia, which are largely unexplored botanically.

An introductory chapter gives much valuable and up-to-date information about the begonias as a whole, concentrating on their biology and distribution. It is interesting to read that a number of species have culinary uses. Apparently the 'refreshingly sour' begonia flowers were once a popular snack for children.

This is not a 'how to grow begonias' book. Rather it is a detailed and beautifully-presented treatment of the begonias of one of the planet's main centres for botanical diversity. You do not need to be a botanist to enjoy and treasure it - any begonia enthusiast will find many rewards within its covers. Maybe one day New Zealand gardeners will be able to grow some of the delightful species that it illustrates, when our overly-bureaucratic country returns to its senses and rescues its world-renowned horticultural and plant-breeding enterprises from threatened oblivion.

**Begonias of Peninsular Malaysia by Ruth Kiew**  
**308 pages, 315 photographs, ISBN 983-812-086-3**

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# RUSH-LEAFED & SPOON-LEAFED BIRD OF PARADISE

## *Strelitzia reginae* var. *juncea* & *S. reginae* var. *parvifolia*

Alan Hislop

There has been confusion over the years about the classification of these strelitzias – *parvifolia* (Spoon-leaved) has been described as a variety of *S. reginae* and as a species while *juncea* (Rush- leafed) has been listed as a variety of *parvifolia* and as a species in its own right. The three (*reginae*, *parvifolia* and *juncea*) seem to have identical flower forms with varying leaf shapes. In the case of the Rush-leaved and Spoon-leaved forms, the flowers are more conspicuous because of the reduced amount of foliage. Flower heads emerge from the plants in late autumn (May) right through to early summer (November). Each flower spike emerges like a straight spear, and then the top of the spear (spathe) slowly turns 90 degrees prior to the emergence of the first flower to give the classical bird-shaped flower head.

Evergreen, stemless perennials from the Cape Provinces and KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, these strelitzias all require full sun, but will grow in shady and semi-shady positions. Under these conditions the foliage becomes a darker green and less upright and fewer flowers are produced. The plants are gross feeders but will grow adequately without being fertilised. Large clumps in the ground have probably never been fed, yet are huge and healthy. (If you want good, healthy plants in pots they will need to be fed and given plenty of root space.) Var. *juncea* and var. *parvifolia* thrive in hot conditions but are frost tender, while *S. reginae* is a little tougher. There needs to be good drainage and reasonable water, but established clumps will stand some aridity. The only pests that I have seen are snails and slugs that damage the foliage.

### **Var. *juncea***

This is commonly known as the Rush-leaved Bird of Paradise because it effectively has no leaf, just what looks like a rush leaf. Closer examination reveals that the leaf does open very slightly at the top. There are variations on this, with the leaf opening more, to the extent that you end up with a leaf that looks like a Zulu spear. (I have called these ‘spear leafed’.) When propagated by division it always develops new leaves that open more but always revert back to a rush.

### **Var. *parvifolia***

This has a leaf that is shaped like a spoon - ‘the rush leaf with a spoon on the end’. The size of the spoon varies from teaspoon through

to large serving spoon. Most of the spoons have a-slightly pointed end but one form produces beautiful round spoon leaves. As with var. *junccea* I have found dwarf, medium and tall plants. I have also found one unique plant with leaves that look like a bread knife profile both in shape and size. The new leaves are emerging looking more like a spear, but I am expecting them to slowly revert to the original profile.

### **Dividing old strelitzia clumps**

The roots are fleshy, moisture-containing, about the diameter of a finger and can run several metres from the plant. They are numerous, having a stringier inner core the thickness of string, and are easily cut by a spade. The roots all stem from an underground tuber that looks like a crown due to the concentric rings around the outside. The larger the plant the bigger and more numerous are these crowns. They eventually get so big that they push out above the ground. Quite often, with a large clump, the middle divisions will be sitting 30-50cm above ground level. Underneath this crown all soil will have gone, there only being a solid mass of fleshy roots.

In large clumps, I have observed that two types of vegetative division occur – side shoots that develop from the divisions on the outer perimeter of the clump and internal division, whereby existing divisions reach a certain size, send out two flowers and then split into two. This seems to happen in the majority of the clumps. 'King' divisions exist in the middle of the clump, are substantially bigger and develop into superior plants when propagated.

When extracting a clump from the ground, it is critical that this is done without breaking the stem from the root crown. Even fracturing this joint will cause a failure to take. Neither the stem nor the crown will grow once this extremely fragile joint breaks. Divisions will almost always flower the following season.

I have found that the best time to divide large clumps is November to January. This is after flowering is complete and the new foliage is starting to appear. It also allows at least three months of warm weather to stimulate root production. It usually takes six to twelve weeks for the crown to start producing new root growth. Note that the old roots will always rot away and cannot be propagated from.

It has been said that divisions are slow and will sulk for one to two years. This has not been my experience and the time of year is probably critical. Propagating in late summer, autumn or winter means that the division has insufficient heat to stimulate new root production and the crown is more likely to rot out with the higher casual rainfall.

## **COLOURFUL AND COOL GROWING**

### **Jonathan Voysey**

The dozen or so bright orange, fairly large, ruffled orchids on a single stem are ***Odontioda 'Harryanum'***, photographed at Drury, Auckland last year.

*Odontioda* is a bigeneric hybrid between the well known *Odontoglossum* and the lesser-grown *Cochlioda*, the latter providing the inheritance for bright colouring. The species, *Odontoglossum harryanum*, is probably a major part of the cross. Both parent genera are cool growing – *Odontoglossum* from the mountainous regions of South America (*O. harryanum* is from the Colombian lower cloud forests at 1800-2300 metres) and *Cochlioda*, with only six species, from the mountainous cloud forests (1700-3000 metres) of Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and the State of Amazonas in Brazil. Both genera are epiphytic in habit.

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## **THE ELLERSLIE FLOWER SHOW**

This year, the new organisers decided to try to bring the show back to its original aim of displaying all things horticultural and garden related.

For some time now, many keen gardeners have not bothered to go as the cost of attending was high, the new venue was some distance away and, apart from the landscaping and sponsored displays, the atmosphere was of unfettered commercialism that had only tenuous links with gardening interests.

As one of the changes, a new marquee (it became a double one) was organised to house the displays of the various clubs and societies who participated. Due to the sterling efforts of Gordon Nolan, president of the Auckland Horticultural Council, there was a good cross-section of clubs and societies present. As well, there were some commercial stands, which included the Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association whose stand was designed by member Jules Moore and won both Gold and the popular vote for best in show.

The space allocated was free (we could not have participated otherwise) and we were issued with passes for setting up and manning the stand. The props were begged and borrowed but not stolen so the outlay was minimal except in time and effort. Pauline Isaacsen lent the slabs and built the bamboo pergola, Alex Schanzer provided pongas, (Continued on page 33)

Cool (down to 4°C), moist and humid conditions in part shade suit them well and they should cope with our wet winter and spring conditions if drainage is excellent.

One source (*Growing Orchids* by Brian and Wilma Ritterhausen) says:

...‘Care must be taken to ensure that the pseudobulbs stay plump throughout the year. On occasion, a mature plant will produce a tall, well flowered spike that is more than it can support. As the buds develop to opening stage, the plant will suddenly shrivel badly, which is an indication that the flowers are sapping its strength and it cannot support them and live. Remove the flower spike immediately and encourage the plant to produce new growth after which slow recovery can begin.’

When grown outside, unlike orchids with small flowers, the larger flowering plants such as *Odontioda*, *Odontoglossum* and *Cymbidium* can be marked by harsh weather and tend to look scruffy as they die off. However, they look wonderful for a considerable time.

***Ada aurantiaca*** is a charming, small flowered orchid with orange flowers (up to a ‘baker’s dozen’ per stem) that contrast well with the glossy, dark green, strap-like leaves. The stems are held at an angle and are frequently pendulous so that the plant should be placed high enough for the flowers to be seen to advantage.

One of up to sixteen species, *A. aurantiaca* comes from the central Andes of Colombia and Venezuela where it grows, mostly epiphytically, at 2300 to 3500 metres. It can sometimes be found as a lithophyte on steep slopes.

Both these orchids were photographed on the same day in early November and represent two very different flowering types. They come from very similar habitats and have much the same requirements – cool (down to 4°C), moist and humid conditions. However, *A. aurantiaca* should not be exposed to sun, temperatures should drop at night (does not always happen here), and wind movement and high humidity are essentials (no problem). The main difficulty is the requirement for a drier rest period in winter – the solution may be to grow it epiphytically in an evergreen tree. Those gardeners growing their orchids outdoors are finding that some species will stand more winter rain than was previously thought possible, especially the cool growers.

**Top: *Odontioda 'Harrynum***  
**Bottom: *Ada aurantiaca***

**Photos: Marjorie Lowe**





# ONE UP AND TWO DOWN

## Marjorie Lowe

Although many bromeliads (especially neoregelias) have distinctively marked and/or highly coloured leaves, most have simple leaves that are either soft and strap-like or stiff and sword-like. These can vary in colour from pale to deep green to silvery grey. Planted as a flattish ground cover, neoregelias - despite the brilliance of the individual plants – can be aesthetically very boring.

To enhance the strong leaf form of bromeliads, whether clump or rosette, the planting of different leaf shapes such as the aroids (alocasia, colocasia, anthuriums, philodendrons, etc.) and the round leafed farfugiums and ligularias provides a contrast as do small-leaved or ferny plants. Each complements the other and provides a satisfying whole that reflects their natural growing environment.

In the photograph on the front cover, a clump of vriesea cultivars in full bloom can be seen to the side of a stepped path that runs up the side of a heavily planted ridge at Wharepuke. Robin Booth has planted these so that they can be seen from a distance. At 70-80cm high the inflorescences are striking. Once the yellow flowers are spent, the brilliant red flower spike remains in colour for many months.

In the close-up opposite, the plants are enhanced by being contrasted with the soft and filmy foliage of a calliandra and ferns. The sloping pathway gives one the opportunity to view them both from above and below. The growing conditions are ideal - shady but not too dark, fast drainage and a humid atmosphere in all but the driest periods.

From the late nineteenth century to the present, vrieseas have probably been the most hybridised (especially commercially) of bromeliads. As a result there are many handsome cultivars available that are unnamed – the label will only say ‘Vriesea Hybrid’, so be canny and buy in flower. Although mostly epiphytes in rain forests from Mexico to northern Argentine, the greatest concentration is found in eastern Brazil. Their habitat ranges from sea level to over three thousand metres.

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**Top Left – *Aechmea Foster's Favorite***

**Top Right – *Aechmea racinæ***

**Bottom: A clump of *Vriesea* cultivars in flower in November at Wharepuke Subtropical Gardens.**

**Photos: Marjorie Lowe**

Other bromeliads, like the aechmeas shown on the previous page, need to be grown at eye-level or just above to be seen at their best. This is most easily done by growing them epiphytically.

**Aechmea Foster's Favorite** is an old cultivar (*Ae. victoriana* var. *discolour* x *Ae. racinæ*) made by Mulford Foster that has stood the test of time. The older leaves are green on top and rich maroon underneath, but the younger leaves are maroon on both sides which may be a variation. The flowering stems emerge fairly upright but the weight of the bright red berries with their deep blue flowers makes them pendent. These berries last for months and are brilliant red when rained on or watered. *Ae. Foster's Favorite* is particularly happy when grown on tree ferns and can be started by poking the pup behind an old leaf stub. As the stolons of each plant move upwards, it is wise to attach it at slightly above knee level as it will grow upwards at a slightly faster rate than the tree fern.

One of the parents of the previous bromeliad is ***Ae. racinæ***, known in the northern hemisphere as Christmas Jewels as, because of its winter flowering habit, it is frequently given as a Christmas present. Moved in flower late last winter to a plum tree crotch, it decided not to flower until spring this year. Its bright red berries are long-lasting but have yellow flowers and are fewer in number than its cultivar. A smaller plant, its leaves are very different – the freshest of apple-green that contrasts well with the tree trunk and other bromeliads growing on the branches.

Both these pendent bromeliads grow well in hanging baskets if you wish them to be portable. Grown in a good bromeliad or orchid potting mix they will grow larger than their counterparts that have to fend for themselves as in nature.

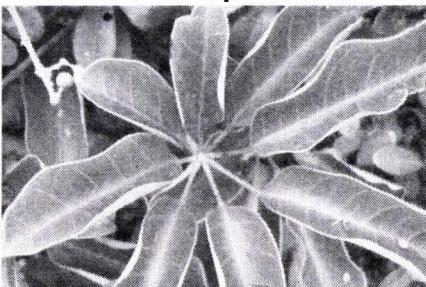
One warning – do not hang the baskets from treated timber, even if painted, as the drips can damage or even kill your plants.

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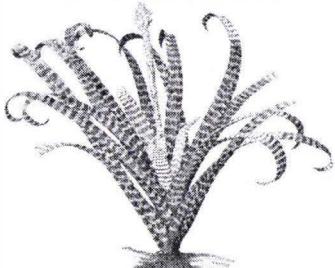
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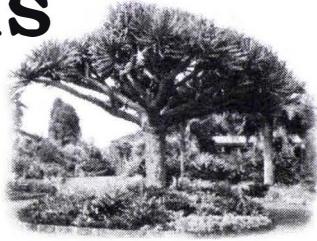
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# **SPRING IS A DANGEROUS TIME**

**Edith McMillan**

After many years of growing subtropicals, even in relatively warm conditions for New Zealand, I finally decided that the danger time for the survival of some tender plants was not winter but spring.

As I have previously written, our winters are short, wet and, by some standards, mild with only small variations in temperature. One day this winter the day temperature was 16°C and the night minimum was 15°C! Usually here the winter day/night variation is about 5-10°C; more is rarer than that 1°C example.

Then spring arrives (usually for me sometime in July). It is cool, wet and sometimes windy – and it goes on and on and on. An Australian once said to me (very accurately) that one could tell when summer arrived because it stopped raining so much.

Plants that successfully coped with winter, seem to give up in mid to late spring. Poor drainage is usually the culprit plus the fact that many gardeners are not aware that many of their subtropical plants come from summer rainfall, dry winter habitats.

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Continued from page 25

rocks, shell and plants and with his apprentice (Robert) and Ian put it all together. Jenny Pullar, lighting designer for Ellerslie, lent and installed the lighting. Bruce Hookham of Cambrian sprayers kindly gave us the long-time use of a sprayer, so that we were able to keep all the plants in good condition for the whole week. Plus of course great efforts from the slaves, Ian McPherson and Diana Holt, who fetched & carried beyond the call of duty, lent plants, mulch, etc. etc. and kept our spirits going. Not to forget all the members who helped on the stand, with the result that, so far, nearly thirty new members have joined for this year and/or next with hopefully, more to come.

This issue was supposed to be out before the Ellerslie Show, but the deadlines were such that it had to be put aside. The question now is; is it worthwhile repeating the exercise again next year? I did not have the time or energy to see the show myself so I would be grateful if those of you who did, could spend a few minutes writing down or emailing some candid comments on what you thought was good, bad or lacking and whether you think it would be worthwhile returning in 2006.

**Editor**

- **Photographs of the stand in the summer issue.**

Common plants like citrus and hibiscus come from summer rainfall areas and need plenty of water at that time of year, plus good drainage to offset the cool winter and spring rains. All gardeners discover that growth is rapid when steady rain and warmer temperatures coincide – the basis of tropical rates of growth.

It becomes obvious that grouping subtropical plants by their water requirements not only provides healthier growing conditions, but also cuts down on work and the amount of water (expensive now) used. Also, watering plants that are used to a dryish summer can lead to fungal infections.

The other spring (and winter) danger comes from cold winds – even if you are frost free a chill wind can do a lot of damage. The new anthurium hybrids produced in large quantities as houseplants, have been bred from the tropical *Anthurium andraeanum* but hybridised to be hardy enough to grow outside in the warmer subtropical zones. The plant in the photograph opposite is growing under a plum tree (still in its pot because of the aggressive rooting system of the plum). To protect it, and the other tropicals, from the prevailing westerlies, trellis covered with rattan blinds was erected. Through winter and spring the plant continued to grow, putting on new leaves and a new flower. So now we know that given wind protection and summer water these anthuriums can be bought in winter for colour in the house and then put out in the garden when the weather warms up.

The very attractive unidentified hibiscus cultivar opposite was discovered, fallen over, in the undergrowth of an untended garden I inherited. On a sloping plant bed facing north and with a tall fence behind, conditions were good if a little dry in summer. Staked, pruned, fed and summer watered it is now healthy and floriferous.

Unlike most hibiscus that come into their own in Auckland in late summer, peak during autumn and have sporadic flowers during winter, this plant only starts flowering in early winter and goes through to late spring. This year it did not stop flowering and the flowers are much larger. Cuttings anyone?

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**Top:**

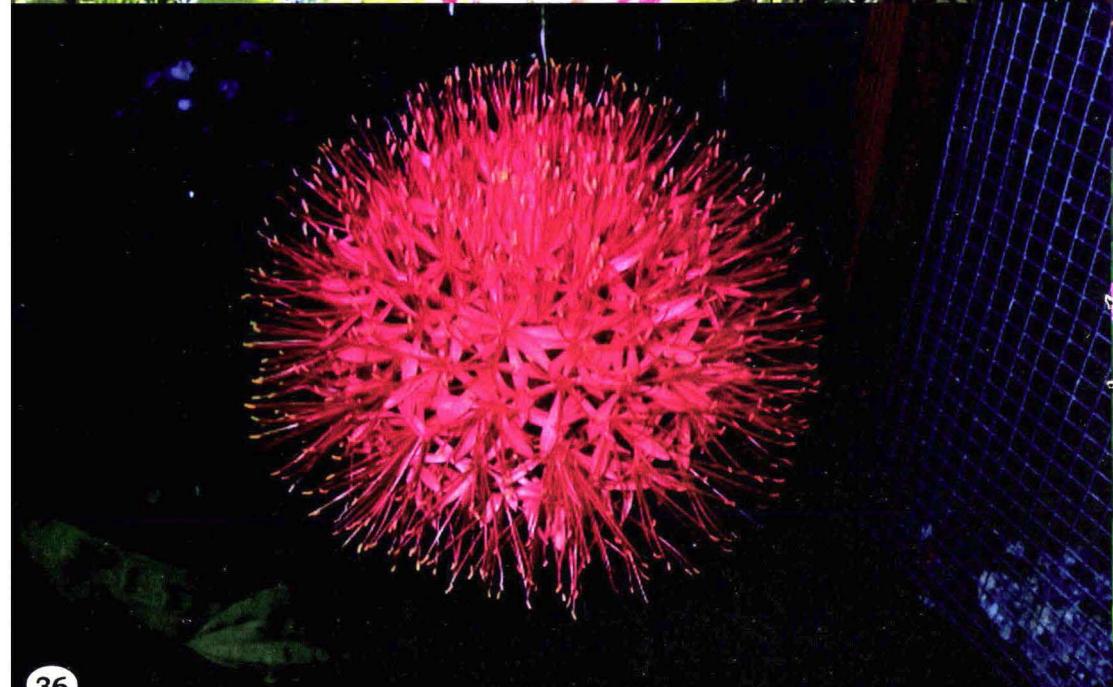
**Unnamed hibiscus cultivar photographed in late winter.**

**Bottom:**

**An *Anthurium andraeanum* cultivar (still in its pot), with beautifully coloured new leaves and, out of sight, a new flower spike. A cymbidium flower is in the background.**

**Photo: Grant Bayley**





# **LETTER/PHOTO COMPETITION**

**And the winner of the \$50.00 Touchwoods Books voucher is Allan Burgoyn-Thomas of Freemans Bay, Auckland.**

Allan lives in the inner city and has a small townhouse garden. As you can see it is lush with planting and has a water feature to cool it in summer. Great to see an exotic looking tigridia from Mexico so at home amongst the other tropicals and subtropicals.

He also sent us a close-up of a *Scadoxus multiflorus* ssp. *katherinae* flower looking absolutely perfect.

- Entries are running low so get your pen & paper and/or camera out and send us an entry. Your plant or garden or something that you have found interesting.

Waiting to hear from you.

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# SUCCULENTS FOR DAMP PLACES

**Brian Timms**

(from a talk given at the 2005 Conference – continued from the winter issue)

## ALOES

I have covered the tree aloes in ‘Succulent Trees’ (Vol. 3 no. 3) but there is a wide range of smaller plants also available, most of which are happy with damp feet.

As usual, there are many forms, from small, ground-hugging rosettes, which usually cluster and/or proliferate, to larger single rosettes, to larger mound formers. A very familiar plant is *A. zebra* (which may also be *A. saponaria*), the small brown-green spotted plant which in time will form a very attractive groundcover, albeit a rather spiny one. Possibly worth trying in the garden are some of the tiny mat-forming species from Madagascar such as *A. rauhii* or *A. bakerii*, or the larger *A. distans* with its creeping stems and peculiar UFO-shaped racemes. There are also a couple of species that will scramble up fences or shrubs. There is a variety of aloes with larger rosettes which may cluster less, or not at all. The best known is the immensely popular *A. polyphylla* (Vol. 1 no. 2) with its smooth triangular leaves in a left or right turning spiral. This plant will flower at a reasonable size (see photo on back cover of the last issue) and may, if you are lucky, split spectacularly into two. It demands high water levels – brown leaf tips usually mean it has been kept too dry. Also try to get *A. macroclada* for its size and flowers.

The most common of those with larger clusters is *Aloe arborescens*, which can get immense if given room and time. In full flower (in winter) it is absolutely stunning. A hybrid (with *A. ferox*) called *A. spinosissima* is equally good but rather spinier. (Surprise!) These plants seem almost indestructible and, although common, are worth the space if you have it. Other beauties of slightly smaller size (so far) are *A. buhrii* and *A. capitata* (Vol 2 no. 3), both of which are supposed to be single rosettes, but in the garden will cluster heavily and flower spectacularly. *A. cameronii* ((Vol 1 no. 2) is also beautiful and, if kept very dry, the leaves will colour a lovely rusty red - but dry is not what we are about here.

## AGAVES

Another genus which runs the gauntlet in size range, agaves are spinier and often more rigidly geometric than aloes. There is less variation in form here, as they are almost all stiff, spiny rosettes that cluster from the base, either before or after flowering which is terminal in both senses of the word. (Monocarpic – dies after flowering)

Agaves never form trees although some species do get colossal. The most familiar is *A. americana* and its variations. This plant can be grey-blue or variegated in several different ways. Perhaps the most beautiful is the very white form, *A. medio-picta* var. *alba* (Vol. 1 no. 4), which is also smaller and less rampant. Unfortunately *A. americana* does have wandering ways and is quietly invading some wild places, especially around the Hauraki Gulf. It seems very happy in exposed places by the sea.

I hesitate to make lists, but here are a few agaves worth searching out: *striata* or *stricta* with globes of needle-shaped leaves; *colorata*, medium sized, slowly stolonising; *kerchovi*, large with pale centre stripe; *parryi*, blue, beautifully geometric rosettes; *victoria-regina*, with its white painted 'patterns', very slow but worthwhile; *verschaeffeldtii*, light grey with twisted leaves; *salmiana*, absolutely colossal with paddle-shaped leaves.

There are many other beauties, but the most popular by miles is the least characteristic – the soft and spineless *A. attenuata*. Rather spoiled by its familiarity, it is nevertheless a wonderful garden plant, proliferating rapidly into dramatic clusters and having a most spectacular flower-spike. *A. attenuata* is beloved by landscapers - and also by slugs and snails.

## GROUNDCOVERS

Rather a slighting way perhaps to refer to a huge variety of small, usually spreading or stolonising succulent plants, many of which have beautiful leaves (for example the ever popular echeverias) and/or are floriferous (ice plants). I am no expert on this section of the succulent family so will content myself with pointing out that many of them are very tough and adaptable to dry or damp conditions.

## EPIPHYTIC CACTI

Also known as 'Orchid Cacti', this group is perfectly adapted to damp conditions in rainforests and usually to shade as well. This is a special field in itself and a good subject for a future article.

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# PLANT SOURCES for this issue

## ***Ada aurantiaca:***

Sunrae Orchids, (09) 294-7713, Drury, Auckland

## ***Aechmea 'Foster's Favorite':***

Greens Bromeliads, Exotica, (09) 425-7474, Warkworth, Landsendt

## ***Aechmea racinæ:***

Greens Bromeliads, Exotica

## ***Anthurium andraeanum* cultivars:**

Zealandia plants seem to make the transition to the garden better than others available – ask for them at your plant centre

## ***Bauhinia* species:**

Species and hybrids - Russell Fransham

## ***Begonia solananthera:***

Nestlebrae Exotics

## ***Calathea louisae:***

Available sometimes in the houseplant sections. St. Lukes Kings is very helpful

## ***Edible gingers:***

Russell Fransham

## ***Farfugium gigantea:***

Now more easily available but usually sold as *Ligularia reniformis*

## ***Hibiscus* – unnamed cultivar:**

Cuttings available via the editor

## ***Marattia salicina:***

The King Fern is generally available from native plant specialists

## ***Odontioda 'Harryanum':***

Sunrae Orchids

## ***Passiflora lindeniana:***

Nestlebrae Exotics specialise in passionfruit varieties

## ***Plectranthus scutellarioides (coleus)* :**

Commonly in the houseplant sections of garden centres

## ***Ruellia macrantha:***

This is around but not always available. Ask for it by name at your local nursery

## ***Strelitzia reginae* var. *juncea***

### ***parvifolia***

Alan Hislop, (09) 834-5716, 027-472-0784, Landsendt

## ***Strobilanthes dyerianus:***

House plant sections – erratic availability, probably easy from cuttings

## ***Vigna caracalla:***

Neslebrae Exotics has seed when available. It is very popular so you may have to wait. We will see if we can get ripe seed from the vine in the photograph.

# **BACK COVER STORY**

## ***Marattia salicina***

**(King Fern, Para)**

**Barbara Parris**

*Marattia salicina* occurs only on Norfolk Island and in the northern half of the North Island, usually in stream valleys in dense bush. It is one of the largest native ferns, with fronds up to four metres long, and only the larger tree ferns, *Cyathea dealbata*, *C. medullaris* and *C. milnei*, can match it for size. Unlike the tree ferns, however, *Marattia* lacks a trunk and develops numerous crowns at ground level.

It is not a fern for small gardens and confined spaces with limited sideways spread, although it takes many years to reach maximum size. Because it does not grow more than about three metres high, however, it can be planted in areas with height restrictions that are not suitable for the majority of tree ferns, which will grow much higher. If you have a suitably-sized and partly to completely shaded site, preferably moist and free from all but free from the lightest frosts, there is no better fern for a truly tropical look.

The fronds are bipinnate, with the secondary pinnae up to 20 x 2.5cm, thick-textured, glossy dark green and sometimes very slightly iridescent. Unlike other New Zealand ferns, the young fronds do not unroll from a crosier or koru. They are hooked with the lamina of the frond hanging outwards from the top of the frond stalk, facing away from the crown of the plant. The stalk slowly elongates and, once it has reached its approximate height limit, the blade gradually expands and lifts upwards.

*Marattia salicina* is tolerant of a wide variety of soil types, ranging from clays to free-draining volcanics. Once established, it appears to be more or less indestructible – the stalks of the fronds may wilt and the whole plant become prostrate, but it can be revived easily with water and seems none the worse for wear. Severe lack of moisture will completely defoliate the plant, although it will eventually recover from this kind of callous treatment, but will take up to two years to recover.

Propagation by spores is very slow, but vegetative propagation by careful separation of the individual crowns of a mature clump is possible, as is propagation from the fleshy stipules at the base of the frond stalk. These can be cut off, with some of the stalk tissue attached, and potted up in coarse potting mix.

# **COLEUS, BY ANY OTHER NAME!**

**William Platt**

Once upon a time there was a very attractive foliage perennial (originally from tropical Indonesia), but usually grown as an annual, called *Coleus blumei* or just coleus hybrids. Just when you were getting used to this plant being renamed *Solenostemon scutellarioides* (and what a tongue twister), it has been lumped in with the plectranthus genus. It is henceforth to be known as ***Plectranthus scutellarioides***.

Whatever - a well-grown plant may vary in colour from green, chartreuse, yellow, brown and buff to salmon, orange, red and purple and endless combinations of these colours. Particularly good leaf colourations are easily propagated from stem cuttings. Removing the flowers will keep the plant in shape and, by preventing it from setting seed, will prolong its life. Reasonable shade, fertile soil and plenty of summer moisture are all it needs.

This autumn I was given a striking red, yellow and green coleus (probably the last of the season's stock). I left it on the terrace in its original plastic bag and was rewarded with cheerful colour right through winter and spring and still looking good although shrinking in size (must strike a cutting before it is no longer).

**Warning!** Now we come to the interesting part. At my place (frost free) caterpillars can strip a coleus literally overnight. Some of our members, as you can see, don't have this problem. One caterpillar in late spring, promptly squashed, has been all this year for me. So learning from this, next year I will be hunting for interestingly leafed coleus at the end of the retail season and treating them as colourful, exotic-looking autumn/winter/spring features. With luck a win/win situation – no caterpillars and a wonderful display.

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(Continued)

*Marattia salicina* is a good doer and relatively undemanding. The old fronds shed their pinnae and then disappear beneath the newer growth, so the plants do not need to have their dead fronds tidied up – a good bonus point. Mine gets a feed of general garden fertiliser and a good organic mulch twice a year. I recommend it strongly to anyone who has the right conditions.

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**Opposite:**

**A few of the endless colour variations that can be found.**

**Back cover:**

**A handsome stand of King Ferns growing in ideal conditions in the fern-house at the Auckland Domain.**

**Photo: Grant Bayley**

