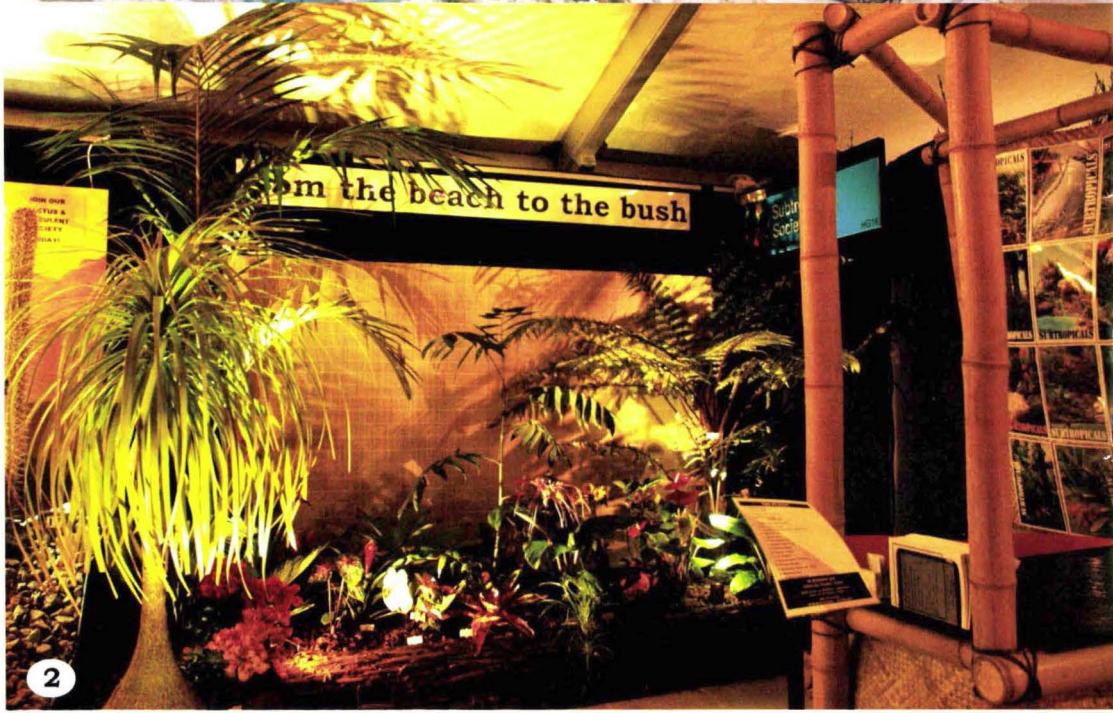


SUBTROPICALS

Summer 2005





SUBTROPICALS

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

SUMMER

Volume 4 Number 4

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**AUTUMN ISSUE
COPY DEADLINE**

All copy must be received by the 31st January 2006

Back on track

With the delivery of the spring and summer issues, we have finally completed volume four for 2005. The autumn issue for 2006 should then arrive at its usual time of the first week in March. It certainly won't be for lack of trying.

The new machine at the printers only turns out glossy colour now, but with the summer issue there has been a considerable improvement in the quality compared with the winter and spring issues. If possible, the index will be included with the autumn issue and will cover the four volumes.

Despite the many problems that 2005 presented, there were also successes – the annual conference and the plant fair were enjoyed by many and our first venture into the Ellerslie Flower Show proved worthwhile. We are steadily building up a willing group of helpers who have been the main reason why things have been turning out so well.

Because the magazines have been so late, the date of the discount of five dollars for prompt payment of membership renewal has been advanced from the first of January to the first of March.

Do participate in the "What plant is this?" section, the 'Question and Answer' page and then win a fifty dollar book voucher with a letter and/or photograph in the competition. Everyone gains if we all join in. Here's to an enjoyable and educational 2006.

Marjorie Lowe
Editor

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THE 2006 PLANT FAIR

This will again be held at the ASB Stadium in Kohimaramara, from 9am to 2pm on Saturday and Sunday, 27th and 28th May.

The layout in the stadium will be slightly different, but we will be keeping the wide walkways that have made it easy for people to move around, especially those in wheelchairs and those with children in pushchairs, not to mention the buyers manoeuvring large quantities of plants in borrowed trolleys.

There has been a request that we have a society stand for those members who only have a few plants for sale. Requirements will be that plants for sale be of good size and standard of presentation. Also, that the plants not be those that are commonly found in the plant centres.

Those plants described as over-the-garden-fence, and often found in older gardens, are often very desirable. The plant centres and propagators are only interested in quantity lines and many interesting plants are disappearing from circulation.

If there is enough interest and available plants to stock a stand, we will make sure that it is manned by reasonably knowledgeable members. Ring, write, fax or email if you are interested in taking part in some way. If we go ahead with this idea, one of our members will organise the necessary arrangements.

Editor

Inside front cover:

For those of you who were unable to attend the Ellerslie Flower Show, we thought that you might like to see the **SUBTROPICALS** stand as it looked by day and by night.

Jenny Pullar, who was responsible for the overall lighting and the floodlighting of the trees at the Ellerslie Flower Show, is a member of the society. She very kindly lit our stand, supplying all the equipment needed herself. The stand looked great on the Friday evening and on the Saturday. However, some of the other stands were plunged into almost complete darkness when some idiot switched off the main overhead lights at 8pm on Saturday night. If Jenny had not provided our lighting, we too would have had to have gone home early in the dark.

Night photo: Jenny Pullar

HEDYCHIUMS ARE A PROMISCUOUS LOT

Russell Fransham

(from a talk given at the Subtropicals Conference 2005)

The Genus Hedychium originates in South and East Asia - from India, Nepal, Burma and Thailand through Indochina to Southern China...and they are a promiscuous lot. They seem to hybridise freely even in their native habitats, making precise identification difficult sometimes. Flowers, often richly perfumed, are produced in terminal spikes above the foliage making many of them very attractive garden specimens. They epitomise all the alluring qualities we associate with tropical flowers; exotically perfumed, extravagant, colourful orchid-like blooms above lushly layered large leaves.

Commonly known as 'Ginger Lilies' or 'Butterfly Gingers', many of them tend also to be fairly aggressive growers, carpeting the soil with impenetrable layers of fat, succulent rhizomes. Foremost among these is the dreaded but beautiful Kahili ginger, *Hedychium gardnerianum* from Northern India. One of New Zealand's most infamous pest plants, this species produces fleshy seeds which are eaten by birds and then dropped in the bush, where the rhizomes can eventually overwhelm all other plants, preventing germination of native trees. Unchecked, it could ultimately wipe out large areas of our northern forests. The fleshy edible seeds are the problem. In New Zealand conditions, many of the other hedychium species seem not to produce seed at all.

While *Hedychium flavescens* is also classed as a noxious weed here, it does not produce seeds, so its spread is much more controllable. It is really only spread by people dumping it in inappropriate places. Its aggressive growth rate however, makes it an overwhelming plant wherever its rhizomes fall. Speaking of the growth rate of this hedychium and most of the others, I would equate it to that of a vigorous canna.

All hedychium species grow well in shade or sun although flowering is most profuse in a high light situation. Foliage looks its best with dappled light rather than full sun. Soil ideally should be moist throughout the year but not waterlogged.

Front cover:

The beautiful leaves of *Hedychium thyrsiforme* are shown to advantage here, together with the delicate looking white flowerhead.

Photo: Russell Fransham

Hedychiums are frost-tender, but in frosty areas they can be cut back to ground level in autumn and thickly mulched for the winter. They are grown in this way in the southern United Kingdom very successfully.

The most famous of the garden-friendly hedychium whanau is ***H. coronarium***, the 'White Butterfly Ginger' or 'Garland Flower', which grows to just over a metre high. Its spicy strong perfume is reminiscent of citrus blossom and the large-petalled, white blooms touched with lemon-yellow, make it a popular garden plant. While it does not appear to produce seed at all here, its aggressive growth, like that of *H. flavescent*s can result in very large clumps in a few years. This is easily fixed with a sharp spade or a dose of strong glyphosate herbicide. Flowering begins in mid-summer and continues till about April or May. Foliage is light lettuce-green and rather soft but creates a lush tropical look very quickly.

Hedychium chrysanthemum is not listed by MAF as being in New Zealand. Nevertheless, a variety of this species has been sold for many years as 'Candycane Ginger'. It is similar in many ways to *H. coronarium*, but the large bicolour flowers are apricot and yellow. Leaves are slightly narrower and stems are taller than *H. coronarium*.

Hedychium coccineum is an interesting member of the family. It is highly variable and vigorous and seems to hybridise with other species easily. Many of these hybrids, as well as the species, do produce fleshy seeds which is a concern.

Some clones of *H. coccineum* produce 12cm to 20cm cylindrical flower heads, packed with small tubular flowers in shades of reddish-orange to apricot with long stamens, while the hybrids tend to have larger flowers in many shades from yellow to deep orange and even pink although I have not seen any of the hybrids available in New Zealand.

Most varieties are about two metres tall, although some grow to around three metres. The flowering of the species seems a very brief affair which is a disappointment when compared to the long season of *H. coronarium* and others.

The opinions expressed in letters or articles in this magazine are the authors' own views and do not necessarily express the policy of the Subtropicals Society.

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The popular ***Hedychium greenei***, from Bhutan in the Himalayas, has handsome dark green leaves with maroon red undersides, while in autumn the large flowers are a very bright orange. This species is seedless but produces one or two viviparous plantlets from each spent inflorescence. These grow where they fall and are easy to control. It reaches about 1.2m and is a spectacular sight in bloom.

Hedychium thyrsiforme is characterised by a small head of pure white filamentous flowers in late summer and handsome foliage with light green, corrugated, hairy leaves. It makes a beautiful garden specimen even without flowers and appears to be seedless in our climate.

Hedychium gracile also has white filamentous petals but the prominent pistils are a striking salmon pink. It is apparently fairly hardy and available in New Zealand, but I have yet to find it.

Hedychium horsfieldii, the “Java Ginger” is normally an epiphyte. It grows only to about 50cm high and has thick rubbery roots with sticky hairs which wrap around branches and store moisture. The foliage is leathery, shiny and light green. Small, tubular yellow and white flowers appear from January to March and are followed by spectacular orange pods which open to reveal scarlet seeds. Its origin in the Indonesian tropics belies its hardiness in this climate. It makes a handsome tub specimen in dappled light outdoors and thrives among rocks or on a tree trunk in semi-shade.

In summary:

All the hedychium species mentioned here grow easily and vigorously in the relatively frost-free areas of New Zealand. All need annual grooming, removal of old stems after flowering to maintain their lush glamour. All of them thrive best in slightly shaded, sheltered conditions with a consistent soil moisture level. Where seeds are produced, some vigilance is advisable as to their weediness potential.

Top:

The white flowerhead to the left is the strongly scented *Hedychium coronarium*. The apricot flowerhead to the right is one of the many cultivars in the *Hedychium Candycane* series.

Bottom:

A large stand of *Hedychium greenei* makes a bold statement alongside the deck that overhangs the lake. (Just love that hand of bananas ripening on the deck).

Photos: Russell Fransham





Caesalpinia gilliesii

Bird of Paradise Bush, Pride of Barbados, Dwarf Poinciana, Peacock Flower
Jonathan Voysey

With so many common names *Caesalpinia gilliesii* should be interesting. It is also tough, fast growing to 2-3 metres and flowers all summer. Cold hardy (zones 7-11) it recovers well from frost.

Originally from western Argentina, Uruguay and Chile, it has naturalised in Mexico and Arizona. With this background it is not surprising that it prefers sandy, well-drained soil in full sun and is drought tolerant. The Dwarf Poinciana is fairly salt tolerant and is good for coastal planting. Our high humidity levels may present a problem and leaves can drop in cold winters.

The clusters of yellow flowers in erect spikes have protruding, bright red stamens up to 12cm long. And what many gardening books fail to tell you but the Sunset Western Garden Book does – ‘caesalpinia pods and seeds can cause serious illness’.

***Asplenium x lucrosum* – a new name for the plant widely cultivated as '*Asplenium bulbiferum*' Barbara Parris**

Members may be interested to know that the widely cultivated fern, with dimorphic fertile and sterile pinnae, abundantly produced bulbils and sterile spores, known as '*Asplenium bulbiferum*', Hen and Chickens Fern, Mother Fern, has recently been recognised and described as a sterile hybrid, *A. x lucrosum*, by Perrie and Brownsey. • The new name for the hybrid is from the Latin *lucrosus*, meaning gainful or profitable, a reference to its widespread commercial availability.

Top:

**The ferny foliage and bright yellow flowers and red stamens of
Caesalpinia gilliesii, growing in a Grey Lynn garden.**

Photo: Gil Hanly

Bottom:

Close-up of the stems and bulbils of *Asplenium x lucrosum*.

Photo: Grant Bayley

In New Zealand it is one of the most well-known and commonly grown ferns. Small plants are usually available in the baby houseplant section of garden centres and super markets, while larger ones can be found in almost all garden centres.

Asplenium x lucrosum appears to have arisen as a hybrid, probably in cultivation, between the New Zealand endemic *A. bulbiferum* and the Norfolk Island endemic *A. dimorphum*. It is widely cultivated, more or less throughout the world, as it is so easy to propagate from bulbils. The genuine *A. bulbiferum* is rarely available commercially, with nearly all plants sold under this name actually being the hybrid. This has had unfortunate results when the hybrid *A. x lucrosum* has been used in re-vegetation projects instead of *A. bulbiferum*, as the hybrid is able to propagate itself vegetatively from bulbils in the wild. The hybrid is also being cultivated as a Maori vegetable with commercial prospects.

While both *A. bulbiferum* and *A. x lucrosum* are good garden plants, it is important to distinguish between them, because there is considerable potential for the misuse of the hybrid in confusion with the species. While both have a spread of up to 1.5m and 2-3 pinnate fronds up to 1.5m tall that produce numerous bulbils, true *A. bulbiferum* does not have different fertile and sterile pinnae, and has fertile spores. *Asplenium x lucrosum* has fertile fronds more finely divided than sterile ones, a character inherited from its *A. dimorphum* parent, and its spores are sterile.

Both are easy in cultivation, preferring medium to deep shade and adequate moisture in dry spells. Too much sun, particularly in summer, will bleach the fronds to an unattractive yellow-green, and too little moisture will encourage scale insects. Twice-yearly feeding will keep them in top condition. Fortunately the old fronds shrivel, die quickly and discreetly, and are covered by the new ones, so there is no need to spend time grooming them.

- (Perrie et al., *Asplenium x lucrosum* nothosp. nov.: a sterile hybrid widely and erroneously cultivated as “*Asplenium bulbiferum*”. Plant Syst. Evol. 250(3-4): 243-257, 2005)

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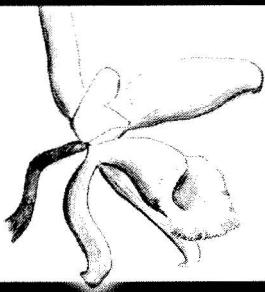
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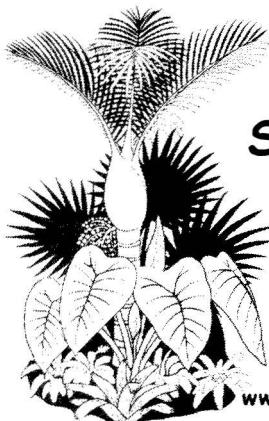
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PALMS FOR AUCKLAND GARDENS

Kevin Johnston

This talk was first given to the annual conference of the Subtropicals Society back in June. I thought then that this was such a useful discussion of what works in northern New Zealand, together with a couple of warnings on maintenance of some species and choice of planting sites, that I'd like to run it in our journal.

Subsequently Kevin was asked to present it again, this time to our September monthly meeting. I took fuller notes than I usually do at meetings. The interpretations of what he said are mine, the photos are Kevin's.

I hope that some of the newer members will find this discussion especially helpful. It can be regarded as a brief state of the art view by a very experienced palm grower and landscaper.

John Prince

Editor

New Zealand Palm & Cycad

Queen Palms

Syagrus romanzoffiana

You won't get your arms around the trunks when they are fully grown – people just don't realise how big they'll get. There is a shortage of landscape grade specimens right now. They take the wind, grow fast and do show variation in form, grace and leaflet width. There was a nice photo of a half-grown trunk in a boxed off planting area alongside a Gulf Harbour home. The force of the trunk expanding was already causing the planter to crack.

Archontophoenix cunninghamiana

Bangalow

This has been a useful plant for providing height and it looks good in a sheltered site. See it in a windy site and you will usually be looking at smashed up leaflets. Some do look better (seedling variation again, but also following from the range of natural habitats that seed gets collected from).

Archontophoenix purpurea looks much better in Auckland winds. It is slower than a Bangalow to start with, but seems to catch up later, and maybe even becomes faster growing. It also has much, much bigger seeds. This has implications for seed dispersal when they start flowering in multiple sites around the city. Birds are not as likely to be able to spread the fruit.

Chamaerops humilis

Mediterranean Fan Palm European Fan Palm

Fantastic against our cold and our winds and is good in arid conditions during hot, dry summer spells. They also stand up to being moved about too. Prune them to control the suckering – you can even hold them to a nice looking single trunked form. Kevin had a good shot of messy looking unpruned forms in Grafton. The landscaping had once looked quite good, but no maintenance eventually resulted in a mess.

Phoenix reclinata

Again, this one looks great as a single trunk, or held to just a few, with excess suckers removed. To see some as real display palms, go to St. Lukes shopping centre. But form and conditions do vary. Kevin liked the job that *Phoenix roebelenii* does also.

Howea forsteriana

'One of the best palms we can grow'. The leaves go sideways in a northwester and just come back again into a [proper shape afterwards. It grows at about half the rate of a Bangalow. *Howea belmoreana* is that much slower again, but has good form too. *Laccospadix australasicus* continues the theme by even slower yet again. It's a pretty, small palm, so good in sun and wind. It's one that really is under-utilised here. The single form looks great, while the multi-trunked ones would make a good screen.

Hedyscepe canterburyana

The best palm we can grow. No other palm has the same presence. It will take coastal winds and even some light frost, but do protect it when it is young. It is slow – less than half the speed of a Kentia, but it's worth it. It can trunk and seed in about thirteen years. This is the one to get if you don't have it already. Kevin has them on each side of a driveway and one is four times as fast as the other.

Top:

Several times this year we've warned readers that people still often don't realise how big Queen Palms will become. This adolescent, whose stem is just visible, is already splitting its planter box apart.

Bottom:

A good example, in Grafton, Auckland, of how NOT to maintain *Chamaerops humilis*. Neglected, the forms have become unkempt.

Photos: ©

Kevin Johnston





Hedyscepe canterburyana **Umbrella Palm or Big Mountain Palm**

The best palm we can grow. No other palm has the same presence. It will take coastal winds and even some light frost, but do protect it when it is young. It is slow – less than half the speed of a Kentia, but it's worth it. It can trunk and seed in about thirteen years. This is the one to get if you don't have it already. Kevin has them on each side of a driveway and one is four times as fast as the other.

Chatham Island Nikau ***Rhopalostylus***

This is faster than most nikau forms (but slower than the Kermadec one). Both are excellent for Auckland. Kermadecs especially can be moved better than used to be thought – with a deep root ball and lots of care. The Raoul Island one is quite recurved and has a purplish crownshaft. Seed for the plant in the photo was originally collected by a weather person.

Exotics

Then Kevin went back to the exotics:-

Dypsis baronii is one to watch for thrips damage. Thrips love them. Keep them out of full wind exposure or they won't be good.

Ravenea glauca, complete with its drooping leaflets, will take a fair bit of wind. Its medium growth rate makes it so far 'a palm to look forward to' in our conditions. There are probably no big ones in New Zealand yet.

Linospadix monostachya (Walking Stick Palm) is very good for small, shaded sites. Photo – Vol.4, no.2.

Top:

Island Beauty.

A great shot of a Raoul Island (Kermadec) Nikau, referred to in glowing terms by Kevin Johnston in his recent near-definitive discussion of palms for Auckland gardens.

Bottom:

A wonderful overhead shot of the best blue-white palm for northern New Zealand, *Brahea armata*. The 'wow' factor was in evidence in audience reactions to this picture in both of Kevin's presentations this year.

Photos:©

Kevin Johnston

Chamaedoreas

Ch. costaricana can make a good screen to four plus metres and they take all day sun, unlike most in the genus, with perhaps a little yellowing in summer. They tolerate wind too. Photo – Vol.1, no.4.

Ch. microspadix is one for much less sun, or none at all. It has a bonus of attractive berries. Photo – Vol.2, no.2.

Ch. cataractarum is very good as an underplanting.

Ch. woodsoniana is excellent in the right spot – that is, a wind and sun protected site. Photo – Vol.1, no.4.

Ch. plumosa is like a mini Queen Palm. It is just fine in the sun, but can look spotty in winter, depending on the conditions.

Cold tolerant species

Kevin finished up with some thoughts on some of the more common cold tolerant species.

Butia capitata looks so good standing alone, perhaps in a dryish situation. Phytopthera may attack them. Quite a few are being lost, whatever the reason, around Auckland. They are better on a dry site and he recommends that you don't irrigate or water them a lot with the idea of getting faster growth.

Brahea armata can be powder-blue. It's slow, but so worthwhile. These palms look good at a young age, and one day, when they've trunked and have begun to flower, they'll be wonderful. They are even better for coastal exposure than Phoenix species, Nikaus, etc.

Brahea edulis gives a spectacular display even before it trunks if given some shelter and care.

Washingtonia palms are considered by Kevin to look better with stripped trunks. He deals to them with a Stanley knife.

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BOOK REVIEW

FLORA'S ORCHIDS

Editors: Kate Etherington, Janet Parker

Senior consultant and principal writer: David P. Banks

Reviewer: Nick Miller

millern@wave.co.nz

When I first heard of this publication I somehow assumed it would be a 'potboiler'. When I eventually viewed it at the 2005 International Orchid Conference in Hamilton, I rapidly revised that opinion. Produced by an international team of writers, well known in the orchid world, the edition available for sale locally is published in New Zealand.

David Banks, listed as the 'Senior Consultant', is well known in Australia and New Zealand. He currently edits the 'Australian Orchid Review' and he also edited 'The Orchadian' (the publication of the Australasian Native Orchid Society) for a number of years. He also has several books to his credit.

This large format, handsomely illustrated volume of 368 pages would make an excellent 'coffee table book', but is far too useful to be wasted in that role. The more than thirteen hundred colour photographs are generally of very high quality. Of particular value are the numerous habitat photographs of orchids growing in the wild.

An introductory section, titled 'The World of Orchids' contains sub-chapters discussing what is an orchid, their taxonomy and classification, hybridising of orchids, the history of orchid cultivation, and detailed descriptions of their cultivation and propagation. Pest and disease control and orchid conservation round off this initial section of the book. Much Australian and New Zealand influence is visible in this forty-two page initial section and the cultural recommendations are generally very relevant to our conditions.

Following this is the main body of the book, an 'A-Z of Orchids'. This is an illustrated guide to virtually all of the orchid genera that are in cultivation. The major species in a genus are covered and (usually) illustrated, together with a good selection of hybrids where relevant.

The entry for each species or hybrid is accompanied by a series of symbols giving guidance as to its type, size and cultural requirements. In the case of major popular genera (*Cymbidiums*, *Cattleyas*, etc.) the species are listed first in alphabetical order, followed by the hybrids.

This section does not pretend to be a complete, illustrated encyclopaedia of orchids, but it is probably the nearest approach that we have yet seen, and certainly the best illustrated.

This section is followed by a useful glossary and a thirty-one page cultural table, summarising the details and requirements of most of the plants discussed earlier in the book. A full index follows. No doubt there should be a few quibbles about any book, but I can't think of one, having read it from cover to cover.

If you are thinking of trying a few orchids and only want one book, this should be the one. If you already grow them and have some orchid books, buy it anyway. Touchwood Books currently have a special on this, while stocks last. It is excellent value.

**Flora's Orchids, Publishers Bateman, ISBN 1-86953-605-3.
\$49.99 plus \$5 p&p from Touchwood Books.**

• **Editor's note:**

I am finding that this book, in conjunction with Robert Friend's Orchids In Your Garden, makes a very useful pair. For someone who is a beginner and only grows orchids in the garden, these seem to give the most clues on what conditions are needed for success.

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SAVING ALOE POLYPHYLLA

Brian Timms

In fifteen years *Aloe polyphylla* has gone from being a very rare plant boasted of by a few succulent aficionados, to a staple garden centre offering. Thanks initially to a few dedicated growers swapping pollen and seeds; it is now mostly thanks to tip cloning. It is a beautiful plant with its numerous geometric, rigid leaves in either a left or right spiral, and its size and hardiness. And every now and then it will produce large and beautiful flowers as a bonus. To add to its desirability, it is one of the few succulents which prefer damp roots, as opposed to merely tolerating them.

But occasionally Auckland's wet and cool winters overcome even *A. polyphylla*'s resistance to wet feet. The problem seems to stem (as it were) from the fact that, being a flat, ground-hugging rosette, it cannot shed its numerous dead and dying leaves and they become a sort of cushion between it and the soil. If conditions get too wet, the decay that naturally happens in this cushion will invade the stem, with potentially disastrous consequences.

My brother-in-law lives nearby and has a much better situation for his succulent garden than I have, with better drainage, a better exposure and more shelter. (Jealous? Me? Never!) He had a magnificent *A. polyphylla*, which was not only much larger than either of mine, but also flowered a couple of times. (Jealous? Me? Never!)

However a year or two ago it began to get shorter rather than taller and it soon became clear that all was far from well. We picked it up and found that it had become detached from the ground and that, as I said above, the rotting dead leaves had infected the stem which was decaying fast. We pulled all the dead leaves off, leaving so little stem that it was difficult to imagine the plant surviving, let alone recovering. We scraped the rotting end off the remains of the stem and then sat the pathetic remnant on top of a bucket to allow it to dry. Lo and behold, six weeks later roots had begun to appear; I would not have thought that there were enough 'guts' left in the plant to form roots!

So we cleared off the old dead bits and pieces from the plant's old spot, put down some more potting soil and pebbles and replaced it straight on top of the ground. One year later, it is still rather flat but thriving, and has split into two heads into the bargain!

SPARE PLANTS TO SELL?

Turn to page 5 for further information

Q & A

Janice Marshall writes:

I have a problem that I hope you can help with. Like most New Zealanders, we have been away for two weeks holiday. I have come back to find our *Trachycarpus fortunei* to be bending over at the main stem, not just one or two leaves. The watering system has been operating every three days for half an hour in the mornings. We have two single palms (1.8m high) and one group of four (the biggest 5m high). It is only the smallest stem of the group of palms that is drooping (at a 40° angle) and of course the other two singles are the same. They have been planted for two years, in a corner garden with a camellia hedge for shelter.

Hope this makes sense as I don't have a digital camera to show you. We have been home for a week and have watered every day since, thinking it was lack of water, but it doesn't seem to have made any difference. We thought we could stake them (to straighten) but can't, they are bent stiff and don't seem to be floppy like other water-starved plants I've dealt with.

The affected palms look healthy and are making new growth. I'm not sure if this is enough information. Can you please help!!!

Answer

This is a very unusual problem but I have had it happen to me. In my case the palms were a Kentia and an archontophoenix (which recovered).

As long as the drainage is reasonable, trachycarpus will just soak up the water you give them. As you say that the plants look healthy and are making new growth, one must assume that the rooting systems are not dying off. This could take a couple of years to occur and the leaflets of the fans would have closed up.

The brief time over which the bending took place is odd, but the fact is that the three palms affected are the smallest and youngest. I will look into the matter further and see if I can come up with something. If you could get someone to take a photograph of each palm and send them to the editor that would be helpful.

Do not despair – my archontophoenix straightened up!

Kevin Johnston

Iochroma **Robin Booth**

Creating comment from visitors is a group of shrubs and small trees called *Iochroma* that come from central and northwest South America. Named from the Greek 'Io' - violet and 'chroma' – colour, referring to the flowers.

Belonging to the Nightshade (Solanum) family, care should be taken with these plants as they are beautiful but poisonous. A species I don't think is in New Zealand has berries which are eaten fresh in their homeland.

Three species are grown in New Zealand and are sometimes misnamed:

Iochroma coccineum, from Central America, has salmon to rose- red clusters of tubular flowers.

I. cyaneum, from northwest South America, has glossy smooth dark blue tubular flowers.

I. grandiflorum, from Ecuador, has larger blue flowers which are softly hairy. Other shades from bluish red to near white can sometimes be found.

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
Email – marlowe@subtropicals.co.nz**

One I would like to see is *I. fuchsoides*, which has red fuchsia-like flowers, but I have not heard of it being in New Zealand. Flowering of all species is over a very long period of time. Species can cross pollinate which will give forms which are very hard to name.

Plants can be pruned back in the winter each year for height otherwise they can grow up to six metres high giving an upright vase shaped plant. They will not stand much frost and enjoy water in the dry times, although I have found that they will survive very dry periods.

In their native habitat hummingbirds drink the nectar and pollinate the flowers. Here tuis take their place. With their long tubular flowers waxeyes cannot get in, so they short circuit the system and break the tube to get at the nectar. I haven't seen it but I wouldn't be surprised if bumble bees do the same. These plants are easy to grow from cuttings or seed.

Odontonema tubaeforme

(syn. *O. strictum*)

Red Justicia, Red Spike

Jonathan Voysey

This is a very useful winter flowering, evergreen shrub from Central America. A fast grower, it will reach 1.5-2m in height if unchecked and an equal spread – a great filler for low maintenance corners.

Odontonema takes sun or shade, although the leaves in partial shade are a darker and glossier green. The upright, fairly brittle stems are not unlike *Justicia carnea* and, like that plant, it is frost tender, needs well drained, fertile soil and reasonable summer water. Regular pruning will prevent legginess. Protect the brittle stems from wind.

Garden centres have been/and are selling it as *Odontonema strictum*, but if you know someone who has it in the garden, ask for a cutting. Stick it in the ground and it will grow for you, but unfortunately it is of no use as a cut flower.

Top: *Iochroma grandiflorum*

Inset: *I. coccineum*

Photo: Robin Booth

Bottom:

Judy prefers to prune her odontonema clump back, after winter flowering, to about half its size.

Photo: Judy Graham





AFRICAN TREE FUCHSIA

African Walnut, Weeping Boerboon or Farmers Bean Robin Booth

Coming into flower now in early December, is a great display of ***Schotia brachypetala***, which comes from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa. This tree was named after a Dutch head gardener, Richard van der Schot of Schoenbrunn Botanic Garden in Austria, who visited South Africa in the eighteenth century. This tree belongs to the pea (Leguminosae) family.

This drought resistant tree grows to ten or more metres high and sometimes nearly as wide. It can be kept smaller by pruning. It is frost tender when young but will stand some frost when it is more mature. The bark tends to be black and rough.

In our climate the tree is deciduous for a short time at the end of winter. Then new coppery-red foliage appears, followed by large clusters of rich, deep red, scented flowers arising from the branches. The compound leaves mature to a deep shiny green.

The common name, African Walnut, is because the heart wood, which is good for joinery, is very similar to walnut in colour, being walnut-brown to nearly black. The name 'Farmers Bean' refers to the seeds which look like broad beans and are good to eat. The weeping part refers to the copious amounts of nectar which can drip from the flowers.

A decoction from the bark is used medicinally and it can also be used to make a red-brown to red dye.

Trees can be propagated by cuttings and seed. Seedling plants take about five years to flower.

A great tree for our climate but not easy to source. I might have some available seed in the coming autumn if I get a good set.

Top:

***Schotia brachypetala* in full flower**

Inset: Detail of the flower

Photo: Robin Booth

Bottom:

This clump of hybrid *Neoregelia ampullacea* now has a spread of about 1.5 metres. It is growing on the immense base of an old *Beaucarnea recurvata* in Mt. Wellington on volcanic scoria.

Photo: Marjorie Lowe

Neoregelia ampullacea

Marjorie Lowe

One of the least spectacular neoregelias is *Neo. ampullacea*, which spreads by short runners (stolons) into clumps or along the branches of trees. This is not to say that the plants are uninteresting, but that they are better seen at close quarters.

The species grows on shaded rocks in coastal areas in its native Brazil, but is now seldom available here. It is a tiny tubular plant flaring out at the top. There are however many hybrid cultivars available in a wide range of colours and markings that are intensified by exposure to sun or high light.

Size is highly variable depending on the parents used in the breeding process and also on the amount of light the plant is grown in – smaller and brighter in the sun and larger and paler in the shade.

I have one clumping nicely at waist level on the top of a dead ponga base, alongside a path. It is now starting to reach out beyond its perch. Hanging baskets are another use and, for the patient gardener, *Neo. ampullacea* can be trained to grow up a pole (or even possibly down a pole for that matter).

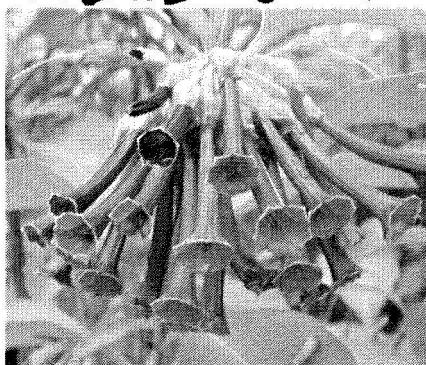
Some garden jottings

What a wonderful season it has been here (at Lake Rotoiti) for *Neomarica caerulea*, an iris relative. A couple of weeks ago, one clump had fifty flowers out at once – a stunning sight. As readers will probably be aware, the sky-blue flowers only last for a day, but a fresh crop is produced every second day for us (daily in warmer areas). The evergreen foliage is good and the plant is long-lived – no regular division or replanting is needed. It should be in every garden.
(Photo and article vol. 3, no.1)

The other day I saw a plant of either *Brunfelsia undulata* from Jamaica (article vol.2, no.1) or *B. americana* from the West Indies, in a neighbour's garden. It had dozens of large, white, ruffled flowers out. It grows near a northern wall of her house and has gone through two or three winters. I had always assumed that this species would be too tender to grow here successfully. Its one failing is that the flowers do not age very gracefully.

Nick Miller

WHAREPUKE

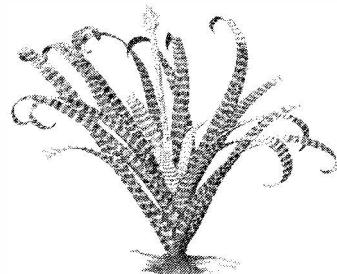


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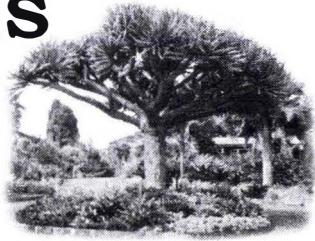


Dietes
robinsoniana

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Dietes robinsoniana **Edith McMillan**

The *Dietes* genus has approximately six species which, with one exception, all come from tropical eastern Africa or South Africa. The odd-man-out is *Dietes robinsoniana* which is endemic to Lord Howe Island off the Australian coast.

Despite the Australian and New Zealand influence in the recent publication 'Flora', the only information available was that there is a species native to Lord Howe Island – nothing more. In fact, if you wanted to learn more about this interesting plant you would only find an entry in the RHS dictionary **and** (wait for it) cultivation information in 'A New Zealand handbook of Bulbs & Perennials', edited by Hugh

WHAT'S ON

FEBRUARY

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

Annual Show

Saturday 4th Sunday 5th

9am to 3pm at the

Alexandra Park Raceway Stables

(Entry from Campbell Crescent off Manukau Road, Epsom)

HEROIC GARDENS FESTIVAL 2006

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10am to 6pm

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www.heroicgardens.org.nz

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ANNUAL CONFERENCE & PLANT FAIR

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MAY 27TH & 28TH 2006

ASB STADIUM Kohimarama Road, AUCKLAND

WHAT PLANT IS THIS?

John Hague-Smith writes:

The plant pictured is growing in Pauanui in sandy soil close to the estuary. It was purchased as *Passiflora coccinea* (red variety) some years ago. However this plant is something else!

The flower is a combination of red/pink/orange colours and does not fully open - it resembles a tulip. Is this a known variety of *Passiflora*? If not, maybe a good name might be *P. tulipensis* or *P. tulipii*!

The leaves are three-lobed; mid-green on top and grey-green underneath with fine white hairs. The flowers are 5cm long. Although not a prolific fruit bearer, the fruits are 7cm long and edible (quite a pleasant taste). The flower stalks are 10cm long.

Overall this is a very attractive plant to have in one's garden.

continued

Redgrove and first published by Godwit Press in 1991. It is presumably out of print now.

The *D. robinsoniana* clump in the photograph opposite is about 7-8 years old and was from the first batch of seeds that Terry and Lindsey Hatch propagated commercially. The upright leaves grow to 1.2-1.5m high and the flowering spikes to about 2-2.5m. These giant spikes of white flowers in summer are the cause of much comment. Grooming is simple as the dead leaves are easily removed. The Hatches now have a dwarf form that is half the size. The large form would make a great informal hedge as the leaves tend to be vertical.

Tough, drought and pest resistant, stands full sun – the only real drawback is that the older, long-lived leaves tend to brown at the tips as they begin to die off. An occasional trim tidies them up.

Top:

??? - identification suggestions welcomed by the editor.

Photo: John Hague-Smith

Bottom:

There are ten spikes on this largish clump of *Dietera robinsoniana*, growing in a north-west facing plant bed.

Photo: Grant Bayley





LETTER/PHOTO COMPETITION

And the winner of the \$50.00 Touchwoods Books voucher is Heather Shingles of Mt. Albert, Auckland.

She writes - 'I was lucky that we had no heavy (for Mt. Albert) frost the first two years my *Beaumontia grandiflora* was planted. I had intended to grow it along the fence but as it reached out to the neighbour's garage and the house on the property over the back, I soon kept it very short. The plant flowers on older wood, so keeping it trimmed produces masses of flowers over the summer season.'

Sunset Western Garden Book says heavy feeding. I have never given mine any in the ten years I have had it planted. Just old grass clippings and it survives on water when it rains.'

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Photos:

Top – *Beaumontia grandiflora* (Herald's Trumpet)

Bottom – *Euphorbia pulcherrima* 'New Reich' (Poinsettia)

Photo: Grant Bayley

Beaumontia grandiflora **Herald's Trumpet, Easter Lily Vine**

A showy evergreen twining vine from the Himalayan foothills - India to Vietnam, *Beaumontia grandiflora* grows in full sun and is a very vigorous grower, not quite rampant. It comes from summer rainfall areas and is reputed to be hardy down to -2°C.

The fragrant, white, trumpet flowers that look like Easter lilies (hence the common name) appear during the warmer months. As it is a woody vine that flowers on the older growths, care must be taken when pruning it after flowering to leave plenty of 2-3 year old wood. If your space is limited or you would like a small, scented tree, consider training it in the same way as bougainvillea, which is often used as a street tree in tropical countries.

- Entries for the letter/photo competition are running low so get out your pen & paper and/or camera and send us an entry - your plant or your garden or something that you have found interesting or puzzling or exciting.**

Euphorbia pulcherrima **William Platt**

Poinsettia

The ubiquitous Christmas pot plant is how most people see poinsettia, but it used to be quite a common garden plant. After Christmas is over, the gift can be planted out (not often successfully), but it is much better to buy a plant intended for garden use.

The poinsettia in the photograph is *E. pulcherrima* 'New Reich'. It is seven years old and is presumably a German cultivar. The bright red bracts (the yellow flowers are insignificant) are backed with a row of deep maroon to black bract/leaves. Flowering starts in May and continues right through the winter.

Usually I prune the shrub in spring when it is bare for a short time, but for the past two years I have been so busy that this has not been done until later. And I have been rewarded!

The first year of neglect saw some of the bare stems with bunches of bright bracts (and flowers) and this year, almost all the stems were covered with the inflorescences.

Moral: Leave pruning to later in the year (or the next year) when the second flush of colour is over and benefit from benign neglect.

PLANT SOURCES for this issue

Aphelandra squarrosa -

Most plant centres in the houseplant section

Asplenium x lucrosum -

Try native plant specialists such as Oratia Native Plants

Beaumontia grandiflora -

Plantet Earth are propagating this – join the waiting list

Brunfelsia undulata -

Wharepuke,

Caesalpinia gilliesii -

Not easy to find but it is out there.

Camellia chrysanthia -

Camellia specialists for this one

Dites robinsoniana -

Joy Plants

Euphorbia pulcherrima 'New Reich'

This can usually be found at plant centres – ask for it by name

Hedychium species -

Russell Fransham, Plantet Earth, Pottering About

Iochroma species:

Wharepuke, Russell Fransham, Plantet Earth

Kaempferia pulchra and rotunda -

Russell Fransham

Neomarica caerulea -

Joy Plants

Neoregelia ampullacea

Greens Bromeliads, Exotica, Pottering About

Odontonema tubaeforme -

Turns up as *O. strictum* in plant centres sometimes

Nestlebrae Exotics

Palms:

Some of our members are palm specialists:

Landsendt

Lok Landscape Palms

Nestlebrae Exotics

The Palm Farm

...and others have a variety of species available

Plantet Earth,

Pottering About

Russell Fransham

Wharepuke

Schotia brachypetala -

Wharepuke

Russell Fransham

BACK COVER STORY

(from a talk by Russell Fransham given at the Subtropicals Conference)

Continued from page eight

Kaempferias

The Peacock Gingers, ***Kaempferia***, are deciduous, shade-loving, essentially stemless, ground-cover gingers, dying off in autumn, to reappear in October or November.

Their perfumed flowers, while beautiful and fragile, only last a week or two but the dramatically patterned foliage is the main event. The stems consist of short, subterranean rhizomes which send flowers and leaves to the surface. This habit means that, like the Zingibers, they can be grown in cool winter zones as long as the soil warms sufficiently during the growing season.

Kaempferia rotunda, from Nepal, is the largest and hardiest of them and grows well in a warm, shady spot. Its delicate, mauve and white orchid-like flowers emerge at ground level in spring, earning them the name 'Asian Crocus'. After a few weeks, the 50cm leaves emerge from the underground rhizome as the flowers shrivel. They are dark green, upright and beautifully patterned with faint silvery markings while the underside is dark purplish red. Snails will enthusiastically demolish them if they get the chance. The rhizomes are traditionally used medicinally in their native habitat.

Another dramatic species is ***K. pulchra*** from the jungles of Indochina. The oval leaves are beautifully patterned in burgundy and bronze, and often mistaken for a calathea. This plant grows only about 15cm high, with the leaves held in a loose rosette close to the ground. This species needs warmth, summer moisture and deep shade. Wet, heavy soils through the dormant winter period are fatal to kaempferia rhizomes.

Top left:

***Kaempferia rotunda* foliage.**

Top right:

***Kaempferia rotunda* flowers emerging from the bare earth.**

Bottom:

With *Kaempferia pulchra* it is the foliage that is the major attraction and baiting is essential.

Photos: Russell Fransham

CAMELLIAS IN THE SUBTROPICAL GARDEN

Nick Miller

Although in New Zealand camellias are generally thought of as cool-climate plants, gardeners in the United Kingdom, Europe and North America think of them as warm-climate plants. Many of them will not take low temperatures well. However, although such species as *C. japonica*, *C. sasanqua*, *C. reticulata* and their hybrids will fit perfectly well into many mild-climate plantings, I am going to briefly discuss a few less commonly seen species with particular relevance to the subtropical garden.

For years, western gardeners were aware of the existence of yellow-flowered camellia species in southern China or northern Vietnam, but they were not available. Eventually a few species arrived and were eagerly seized on by hybridisers. I understand that, to date, we are still awaiting the advent of large-flowered golden yellow camellia hybrids – perhaps that is just as well. The yellow flowered camellia species tend to have small flowers and have a reputation for being shy-flowering. However, their value as foliage plants makes them well worth growing. We have two such species in our garden. I think they originally came from the late Os Blumhardt of Whangarei, the source of many fine plants.

Camellia chrysanthia (sometimes known as *Theopsis chrysanthia*) is a handsome shrub or small tree, with magnificently glossy, quilted leaves. We have two plants, one in deep shade, the other in a spot where it receives morning sun. The plant in shade produces much better foliage and looks generally happier (see photo). We planted these some ten to twelve years ago, in the hope that one day we might see some flowers. It was a case of hope deferred, until May of this year, when I noticed a couple of small round golden buds on the plant growing in the sunnier location. In June, a couple of flowers opened, each about 5cm across. The digital camera has tended to wash out the colour somewhat – in reality the flowers are a good bright yellow and very attractive. It will be interesting to see whether we get more flowers in the future. Flowers or no flowers, this species is an excellent candidate for producing beautiful foliage in deep shade.

Rather similar is another yellow-flowered species, ***C. euphlebia***. Our plant of this is also growing in deep shade, and the foliage is excellent (see photo). I have yet to see this species in flower.

There are other semi-tropical camellias that are worthy of attention. ***C. granthamiana***, with large single white flowers and leathery, glossy, quilted foliage does well for us. We do not grow *C.*

hongkongensis (deep red flowers) but one of its hybrids does well. A visit to a camellia specialist may well reveal other species that would look well in the subtropical garden. It would be best to be in soon, while such specialist nurseries still exist.

Aphelandra squarrosa **Edith McMillan**

Zebra Plant

The Zebra Plant is a frost tender, understorey plant in moist woodland. Mostly from Brazil, it is also found in other parts of tropical America. Despite Botanica and Flora suggesting zones 11-12, Albrecht Llamas is much more realistic with 10-11. As you can see from the photograph taken in a Parnell garden, these plants are growing very healthily under palms in the company of begonias, bromeliads and clumps of *Farfugium gigantea* (see article in the spring issue).

The leaves alone make this plant worth growing, but it is the striking, long-lived flower spikes that occur twice a year (in autumn and spring) that are so interesting. The flowers are white and insignificant, emerging from bright golden bracts that very slowly change to lime-green before dying. This can take 2-3 months. The flower spike is very geometric in form, almost pyramidal.

Like *Medinilla myriantha*, this aphelandra needs good summer moisture and, if drainage is good, is quite happy coping with our winter rainfall. Not a particularly long-lived plant, it is a reasonably fast grower in fertile, moist soil. On the whole, snails and slugs seem to leave it alone.

As well as the species, there are many cultivars available in the houseplant sections of garden centres. Some of these have been hybridised to decrease the green and increase the creamy-white colour to almost total coverage. I have one of these in a shady spot on the terrace where it is doing well and, with luck, will flower for me this coming autumn.

Top left:

***Camellia chrysanthia* – one of the two flowers produced in the first flowering.**

Top right:

***C. chrysanthia* foliage.**

Photos: Nick Miller

Bottom:

A group of *Aphelandra squarrosa* lightens up a shady spot.

Photo: Gil Hanly

