

# Auckland Garden

Newsletter of the Auckland Botanic Gardens and Friends

December 2023







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Auckland  
Botanic Gardens  
102 Hill Road,  
Manurewa,  
Auckland, 2105

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**Contributions to the  
newsletter are welcome**  
Material for the March 2024  
issue should be submitted by  
3 p.m. Friday 2 February 2024  
to the Editor  
ross.ferguson@  
plantandfood.co.nz

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**Images** Front cover: Nathan land © Bayleys. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Maintenance Men Renton Campbell, Vince Soulje and Alan Mathews reinstalling the boat; Maintenance Men Alan Mathews, Garry Hadfield, Graeme Hauer, Lester Notley, Peter Biland and Vince Soulje; Barbara Harvey at the base of an old *Eucalyptus fastigiata* at Woodlands.

# Front Cover: acquisition of the Nathan land

The photograph on the front cover shows the land recently added to the Botanic Gardens.

Viv Canham, President of the Friends, writes:

By now you will probably be aware that Auckland Council has purchased for the Gardens the 1.6-ha block of land fronting Hill Rd and running between the Nursery and the Mobil Service Station. While it was a lot of money to pay in a time of fiscal tightening, the fact that it was a once-ever opportunity to secure this valuable land was fortunately recognized by the Mayor and Councillors. Our sincere thanks go to all those who made it happen, especially to Councillor Christine Fletcher, a member of the Friends Board of Trustees, who got the ball rolling. The Friends look forward to supporting the eventual development of the land.

The land will have the same legal protection as a Regional Park and therefore will be protected in perpetuity under the Local Government Act 2002. This means that the land will be held in public ownership for natural, ecological, botanical and recreational purposes, and is protected from disposal.

Until development commences, the property will be maintained and the Gardens Master Plan will be reviewed including consultation with Iwi/other stakeholders to determine future use.

Jack Hobbs, Manager of Auckland Botanic Gardens, writes:

The recent acquisition of the Nathan family land is one of the highlights of my career. It feels like the final piece of the jigsaw puzzle has fallen into place, and it is now up to us to ensure the potential of this prime piece of land is realised.

The Nathan property is at 120 Hill Road and comprises 1.6 hectares (4 acres) on the eastern boundary of our nursery, stretching along Hill Rd to the Mobil petrol station. It slopes gently to the north and its elevation provides panoramic views of the Gardens, so it is easy to understand why Frank and Jill Nathan located their house there. The property comes with a substantial home and a few sheds, some large trees and quite a few weeds that we will progressively deal with.

It really is the final piece in the jigsaw for the Gardens, and to say we are all delighted is an understatement. I must say we are also somewhat surprised given the financial challenges facing Auckland Council, and I acknowledge the foresight and courage of the Mayor and councillors for supporting this acquisition knowing that although it was the right thing to do it could generate criticism. Wonderful support was also provided by senior Council staff, particularly Dr Claudia Wyss (Director Customer & Community Services), and Taryn Crewe, (General Manager, Parks & Community Facilities),



and the legal team. In the end it was a great team effort!

I must also acknowledge the contribution made by the Nathan family. Frank Nathan farmed the land for 30 years before he and his brothers decided to make the land available for botanic gardens as a tribute to their father's love of gardening, instead of developing and subdividing. I sat down with Frank not too long before he died in 2006 and he told me he hoped that the last block of Nathan land they still lived on would one day become part of the botanic gardens. I am delighted we have honoured that wish. During this latest venture Frank's daughter Robin Nathan has provided passionate support for retention of the land as public space.

Robin first made me aware the family was planning to sell the land in March 2022, but our initial attempts to generate interest and support did not gain much traction which is probably understandable given the difficult financial pressures faced by Council. She has regularly updated me on progress including letting me know when the land finally came onto the market.

I have really valued her timely updates, good humour and patience.

The Friends Committee decided they would attempt to raise the funds, but the cost involved was just too much. Following a Friends Committee meeting attended by Councillor Christine Fletcher momentum began to build, and a week or so later Mayor Wayne Brown and Councillor Daniel Newman visited the property, as did senior council officers. When visiting the property in person it is impossible to ignore its strategic value, but difficult decisions lay ahead. Ultimately it was heard in a confidential session by the Governing Body, and as we now know the decision to purchase was made. I will admit that was the most nerve-wracking meeting I have ever experienced, but in the end a courageous and far-sighted decision was reached, one I will always be grateful for.

As background, 42 hectares (104 acres) of the land now occupied by the Gardens were purchased by the Auckland Regional Authority (ARA) from the Nathan Estate in

Jack Hobbs and Robin Nathan



1967 at a cost of \$200,000, with Manukau City Council (MCC) purchasing the adjoining 40 hectares. In 1982, the ARA purchased 20.5 hectares from MCC at a cost of \$725,000 and accepted from MCC a gift of a further 2.2 hectares to provide a northern frontage off Everglade Drive.

This latest, much smaller 1.6-hectare block was purchased for \$12.37 m, which excluding GST is \$10.76 m, showing how land prices have escalated over the years. It will be funded by debt to spread the cost over future generations who will also experience the benefits. I am sure that these future generations will look back at the cost and regard it as money well spent.

So, what will the benefits be? They will not be immediate, but in time a couple of possibilities stand out to me. These are the two ethnobotanical gardens included in our current Master Plan, the traditional

Māori Garden and a Pacific Garden featuring subtropical and Polynesian plants. An ethnobotanical garden showcases the plants of a particular region and their traditional uses such as for medicine, food, clothing and other cultural and practical purposes. These options and others will be considered during a review of the Master Plan which will include all our key stakeholders including Mana Whenua and the Friends. In the meantime, we will begin clearing up weeds and removing a few trees that are either weedy or pose potential risk, and otherwise we will just mow the grass and maintain the gardens until such time as development begins. The Friends Executive Committee agreed to support future development at their meeting on 13 October. I imagine this will include input into the planning phase and generating funds when the time comes, and it will be exciting to realize together the potential of this amazing site.

Photo credit Bayleys



# Jack's update

The recent purchase of the Nathan property at 120 Hill Road has occupied most of my time in recent months, so my update is relatively brief.

The cherry blossom season has attracted unprecedented numbers of visitors and media attention. During peak flowering both carparks were filled by mid-morning on weekends, with many visitors dressing in pink to match the blossoms and staying for much of the day.

As our clivia plantings have matured they too have become a major spring attraction at the Gardens, notably in the Palm Garden, Camellia Garden, Auckland Border and Urban Trees. I made regular visits to Joy Nurseries to check out their magnificent clivias during the flowering season, and Terry Hatch will write about them in an upcoming issue.

Another recent highlight was a guided walk of our Sustainable Stormwater Trail expertly led by our former curator Bec Stanley. We were joined by several members of Council's Arboriculture team led by David Stejskal and others interested in Water Sensitive Design. We have a comprehensive array of different connected stormwater treatment systems at the Gardens that cleanse our water and slow down the pressure on drainage systems and natural waterways. I am sure they contributed to the relatively minor damage we suffered during the extreme

downpours we have experienced this year.

The clinker lifeboat has been restored to its original condition and returned to its location in front of Café Miko by Renton Campbell and his intrepid team of Vince Soulje and Hippy (Alan Mathews). It is much loved by our younger visitors who are delighted to have it back.

The Friends AGM on Saturday 28 October was most enjoyable, very well chaired by our President, Viv Canham, followed by an entertaining and informative presentation by Jeff Jones on his Buchanan Award experiences. Jeff writes about this elsewhere in this issue. It was great to welcome two new members to the executive, but sad to say goodbye to Laure Lamason who has been such a pleasure to have on the committee for many years. I enjoyed Laure's brief farewell speech, particularly her observation that "Liz Powell has the sap of the Gardens running through her veins". Very eloquent and absolutely true!

I was honoured to read out the life membership citation for Ross Ferguson at the AGM. Ross has done so much for the Gardens, and we are all delighted he has finally agreed to accept a life membership after previously declining the offer. His full life membership citation appears later in this issue.

Jack Hobbs



# Introducing our "Star Performers"

We have recently added over 200 new signs to the Gardens that let visitors know they are looking at one of our highly recommended "Star Performer" plants.

Sharing plant knowledge is a core value of the Auckland Botanic Gardens and the signs are the latest addition. There is one sign for each of the top plants that feature in our "best plants" pamphlets.

Each sign has a photo, a brief description of the plant, and a QR code. Scanning the code by smartphone takes users to the relevant page in our online Plants for Auckland database. This is the gathered knowledge of many years of trialling and testing plants for ongoing resilience in Auckland conditions.

Plants for Auckland went live in 2019 and was almost immediately used in large numbers. The database gets well over 30,000 unique visits per month. It is clearly useful to many people. But we also want to ensure visitors to the garden are aware of its usefulness.

The hope is that people will be inspired by what they see, scan the QR code, and be introduced to the qualities of the plant. From there they can make a decision about whether it would be right for their garden, or just learn a little more about the plant.

However, we know not everyone who visits is a gardener. The signs also stand alone as a way of imparting a bit of plant knowledge and remind people that they are in a botanic garden, a special place of

research, testing, records, and a wealth of knowledge (as well as being one of the loveliest places in the city).

The signs are a way to bring our expertise and advice out into the garden. We don't really know if they are working or not but there is magnificent optimism that they will be a success.

Paul Swift





# President's report

This quarter's news has been dominated by the purchase of the block of land between the nursery and the Mobil Service Station, to round out the Auckland Botanic Gardens and to open up new opportunities for garden development.

Thanks again to the long chain of people who enabled the acquisition of this valuable asset for the Gardens, starting with Jack Hobbs who has been relentless in exploring all options, attending meetings and showing the decision makers concerned just how much this piece of land matters to us and to the Auckland public. Jack has described the purchase in greater depth at the beginning of this edition of *The Auckland Garden*.

Our Board of Trustees member Christine Fletcher from the Auckland Council came to an Executive Committee Meeting recently. She spoke to the members about how charitable organisations such as ours are having more and more difficulty in recent years attracting volunteers. Thankfully, we don't presently have a problem with that though new helpers are always extremely welcome. She feels that parks in general aren't recognised for their value to society today. She feels that climate change language frightens some people and that we should concentrate on "sustainability" instead. Younger people are interested in this and hopefully it will result in a new generation of gardeners.

I'd like to acknowledge that Christine was a prime mover in the purchase of the

Nathan land. So, our grateful thanks to you Christine.

I was delighted when Ross Ferguson finally agreed to accept Life Membership of the Friends. When he has been asked to accept this honour in the past he has said he didn't feel he had "done enough" despite being an active Executive Committee member for many years, being on the Library Committee and producing this wonderful newsletter. However, he has now relented and joins a list of marvellous people who have worked for the betterment of the Gardens. Ross was presented with the honour at the recent AGM.

The AGM also saw the retirement of long-standing Executive Committee member Laure Lamason. She has been Secretary for a number of years. Her sense of humour and wise counsel will be very much missed. We welcome two new Committee Members, Chris Allen and Linden Johnson, and look forward to their involvement on the Committee.

We had a good turn-out at the AGM with around 40 people enjoying a presentation from our 2022 Buchanan Award winner, Jeff Jones. Jeff is such an accomplished speaker. But we won't tell him that because then he might want to change his career! The photos that he took of the Gardens which he visited in U.S.A were stunning. He brings back a wealth of ideas which he wants to integrate into our Gardens.

Our thanks to Café Miko for the light and tasty afternoon tea which was beautifully presented. Dereck's staff were very efficient and delightful. The starting time of 2 p.m. seems to suit most people although parking is quite tight around that time, with throngs of people enjoying the Gardens. We will look at a remedy for the parking issue next year.

The next challenge for the Committee is reviewing its Constitution which has become necessary because of changes to both the Charities and the Incorporated Society rules. Vice-President Cleone Campbell is leading a team to take on this work.

Our "Friends Day Out" continues to be popular with recent talks on the Tree

Crops Conference by Kathrina Muller and Laurence Speedy and our trip to Joy Plants Nurseries where we were instructed and entertained by Terry and Lindsey Hatch. We will have been on our November bus trip to Gordonton by the time you read this.

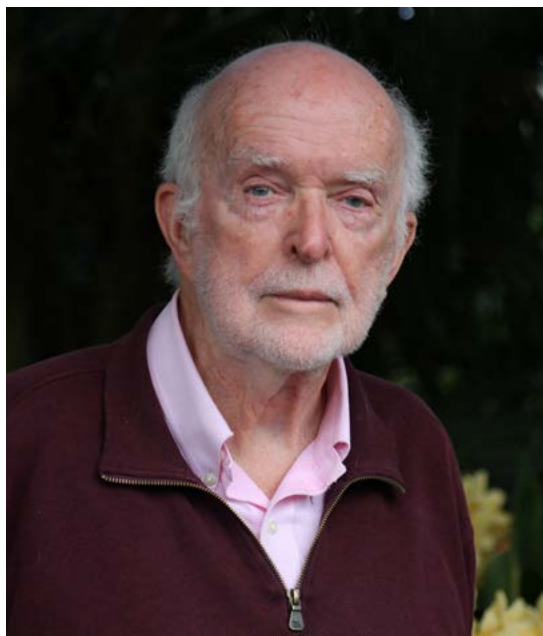
Feedback from my monthly "Just Between Friends" news-sheet has been very encouraging, so thank you for this. If you should have an interesting article that you would like to share with the Friends, just pass it along to me. Similarly, I am happy to list any garden-related items for sale or looking for a good home. Or if you are on the lookout for a particular plant, I can publish that too. Thank you

Viv Canham  
President

## Ross Ferguson life membership citation

October 2023

Ross Ferguson has made a significant contribution to the Friends of Auckland Botanic Gardens over his many years of service, and his award of life membership is well-deserved and, in my view, long overdue. Ross is a celebrated senior scientist, his career beginning at the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) on 25 January 1965 and later transferring to The Horticulture and Food Research Institute of New Zealand Ltd, now part of The New Zealand Institute for Plant and Food Research Ltd. After retiring in August 2008, he was retained on a part-time contract with Plant & Food



Research until 2015 but now works on a voluntary basis. His achievements were recognised with a Royal Honour when appointed an Officer, New Zealand Order of Merit, in the Queen's Birthday Honours, 2007.

Ross has brought academic rigour and a wealth of institutional knowledge to everything he has contributed to the Gardens. He has served the Friends in many capacities including as a member of the Executive Committee, of the Library Committee, and as Editor of our newsletter *The Auckland Garden*. Ross has also been a valued contributor during the preparation of strategic documents such as the Auckland Botanic Gardens Management Plan, and he has also been involved with other ABG strategic planning reviews.

His numerous contributions include serving as a member of the Library Committee and sorting out the Platt book bequest. He joined the BG Library Committee in about 2000 and remains an active member today. His main contributions to this committee are keeping immaculate minutes as secretary, and provision of wise counsel on book selections.

When Graeme Platt died in October 2021 his family gifted his extensive book collection to the Gardens. Ross undertook the daunting task of sorting through the many hundreds of volumes into various categories including determining those that were not already in our collection and therefore eligible for introduction into our Library collection. These comprised the largest single donation of books in the history of the library.

Ross joined the Friends Executive Committee in 2009 and remains a member today. His wisdom and informed opinions are highly valued by the committee, and as the only other male I have particularly appreciated his company. He is particularly valued for his commonsense decision making and for his horticultural and scientific knowledge. Ross also acted as a Friends trustee from 2008 – 2014.

Ross succeeded the late Dr Rod Bieleski as Editor of *The Auckland Garden* in late 2017 and remains in that role. The positive feedback from Friends members is testament to the outstanding contribution Ross has made in this role. He consistently ensures a balanced spread of interesting content, he is an expert at correcting the many errors in the content I provide, and he also contributes his own informative and interesting articles.

Ross assisted with editing the 25th jubilee history of the Friends, *The First Twenty-five Years 1983 – 2008*. He also edited the Ayrilies Garden & Wetland Management Guidelines (October 2018) which was most appreciated by Bev McConnell and her family. Ross also compiled the index for Ayrilies, *My Story, my Garden* by Beverley McConnell. This was a huge job, and one Bev was very grateful for.

Ross was a member of the curatorial panel for our 2018 Botanical Art Worldwide exhibition, contributing his extensive horticultural knowledge and skills as a sophisticated collector of botanical art to the selection of works for inclusion in the exhibition.

Ross has contributed significantly to horticulture in many other fields,



particularly to the development of the kiwifruit industry.

Throughout my term as President of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture from 2003 – 2011 Ross served as vice-president, and I always appreciated his support and consistently well-informed contributions. He was elected an Associate of Honour of the

Institute in 1998, twice gave the Institute's Banks Lecture and was the recipient of the Institute's Garden History Award in 2021. He has also served as a member of the Garden Committee, Government House, Auckland from 1996 until the present.

Ross Ferguson thoroughly deserves his election to Honorary Life Member, Friends of the Auckland Botanic Gardens

Jack Hobbs

## J. Barry Ferguson (1931-2023)

We note with sadness the recent death of Barry Ferguson.

To call Barry a florist would be to seriously undervalue him. He did start his career with a florist shop in Christchurch but left New Zealand in 1962. After a relatively brief period in London, he shifted to New York where he soon established his company J. Barry Ferguson Flowers Ltd, and designed gardens and floral installations for special events. David Rockefeller, Horst P. Horst, Billy Joel, Malcom Forbes and Steven Spielberg were amongst his clients. One of his neighbours at Long Island and a friend was J.D. Watson of Watson and Crick fame (the structure of DNA). After about 30 years in New York, Barry retired to New Zealand with a splendid house and garden overlooking the Mahurangi and then more latterly, to Warkworth.

Barry's autobiography was entitled *Flowers are my Passport*. This is a fascinating account of his life mentioning some of his more colourful exploits – including participating in an acting troupe which toured Scandinavia with Sir John Gielgud. Barry was a lover of flowers – especially paeonies – but he was much more: a gentleman, a real stylist, a perfectionist and a great raconteur. He was always fun to meet. He never did things half-heartedly, he abhorred the second-rate and he built up an impressive collection of botanical art.

Barry was a generous benefactor and supporter of organisations in Warkworth. He also donated the Chris Booth sculpture *The Green Man* to Eden Garden.

Ross Ferguson

# Art Group news

We have whizzed through yet another year – even though we had an interrupted start with the cyclone cancelling our first meeting at the end of January, the rest of the year went as planned.

Here is a recap of what we got up to this year.

February saw us spending a delightful morning with Neal Palmer, who was the Artist in Residence at the Gardens. As part of his residency, he gave us a talk about his work and showed us around the gallery telling stories about some of his works. Later we went back to the Friends Building and all had a go at looking at plant details and working them up large in pastels which for some of us was a bit of a struggle! It was wonderful to see his most recent exhibition with works from and inspired by his residency. <https://nealpalmer.co.nz/>

In April, we made concertina sketchbooks similar to one I made for my visit to the Chathams earlier in January. It's amazing how you can create a sketchbook just by folding one piece, albeit a big piece, of paper and a few cuts along the fold lines. These were eagerly finished and taken home ready for the next holiday or nature journaling session.

June saw us watching member Wilma Blom demonstrate her vibrant gouache painting technique on a dark background. Gouache (pronounced "G00-aash") is an opaque watercolour paint that needs a delicate touch as adding more layers or too much water can disturb the underlying

ones. You can make a bit of a muddy mess if you're not careful – definitely not what you want to do! Wilma has mastered this tricky medium beautifully and demystified it for those of us wanting to have a go. You may remember seeing some of her very beautiful gouache paintings on black backgrounds in our exhibitions.

In August, textile embroiderer Cathy Brickhill came to show us her intricate and very beautiful 3D botanical embroidery. Cathy had a very appreciative audience, many of whom went home planning to dust off their sewing machines and have a go. Even I, who can't sew a straight line thought about it – after all there aren't many straight lines in nature are there? <https://cathyjanedesigns.com/>

Our last demonstration this year came about as I had a few members ask me to give a demonstration on using scratchboard or scraperboard as it is sometimes called. You may recall using it at school – it is basically scratching lines through a black ink layer to reveal the white clay layer underneath. Drawing lines and dots to create different tones with sharp scalpels, wire or fibreglass brushes can produce wonderful 3D images on the board. You can go a step further and add watercolour or colour pencil, even oil or acrylic paint to add colour to what would be otherwise a black and white tonal drawing. I've never known the group to be so quiet – you could hear a pin drop, I'm just glad we didn't hear any scalpels drop.

The months in between the

demonstrations our friendly group got together to carry on with our own work, get inspiration and help from each other, with of course lots of chatting and cups of tea as we work.

Our annual exhibition, *Hidden Secrets* had us looking for unusual or overlooked plants, finding interesting uses for them – historic or modern, or delving deep with magnifiers to find tiny details to put on show. Along with the information boards for each plant, the public were captivated by not only the beautiful artworks but also the interesting stories behind the work. Who knew that the Peace Lily, *Spathiphyllum*, had so many superpowers, one being able to remove mould spores from the air – I certainly didn't.

Each year as I look back, I am so grateful for the artists who volunteer their time to come and demonstrate for us. Many

thanks must also go to all the members who come along, help set up and clear up or take over if I am away, willing to try out new things, often putting themselves out of their comfort zone while doing so and helping and encouraging others. So, thank you, what a great bunch – you make my job so much easier.

Lastly, why not come along? We welcome new members, whether complete beginners or working artists so if you'd like to know more, contact me on 021 161 7070 or email me on [lesley.alexander.smith@gmail.com](mailto:lesley.alexander.smith@gmail.com)

Oh, one last thing – if you think you should be getting emails about the art group from me and aren't – check your spam folder first, then if they are not there, let me know. Likewise, if you'd rather not hear from me, let me know too.

Lesley Alexander

## The Growing Friends

The Growing Friends are really busy and sales are improving all the time, Sundays are really busy and all this means we need to keep producing more plants. However we still have a great range of native plants perfect for gardens or revegetation projects. Our salvias are looking good and we have a good selection of perennials available. As always we love to recycle cleaned pots, bring them in on our open days and stay to choose some great plants for your garden.

Bronwen Rowse



# Ewen Cameron retirement

Esteemed botanist Ewen Cameron recently retired from his role managing the Herbarium at Auckland War Memorial Museum for 32 years. Ella Rawcliffe, Jonathan Corvisy and I attended Ewen's farewell function where colleagues and acquaintances spoke in glowing terms of his achievements. During his tenure the herbarium specimens increased by 180,000 specimens, Ewen personally collecting nearly 18,000 of them. The Gardens do not have an herbarium and so all our specimens are lodged in the Museum Herbarium and currently number around 1,000.

Ewen has had a long association with the

Gardens. He completed an early survey of our forest, first surveying it on 3 June 1975 nearly 50 years ago, shortly after he had finished his Bachelor's degree at the University of Auckland. The Auckland Regional Authority had contracted Ewen to write something on the Nature Trail in the Waitakere Ranges and Phil Jew asked if he would spend a day in the Gardens bush as well. He revisited the Gardens Forest on an Auckland Botanical Society trip on 20 June 1992 and combined the observations of both visits in a Bot. Soc. article: "Native forest at the Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens". Ewen reported the best examples of matai he had seen in the Auckland area, and I recall him saying it was the most significant remnant stand of native forest remaining in the Manukau Ecological District.

I also recall vividly meetings of the Native Plant Advisory Panel in the early eighties with Ewen and the late Graeme Platt, Joan Dingley and Brian Buchanan. Joan and Graeme would often engage in fiery debates, usually over some small botanical nuance, while the rest of us watched on too afraid to say a word. Ewen says he wondered if they would ever speak again, but immediately afterwards they would have a cup of tea together as though nothing had happened. Ewen always remained completely unflustered, at least on the outside, and his contribution to these meetings was always well informed and extremely valuable.

Ewen has also made a significant contribution to the identification and management of environmental weeds,



and threatened plants, recently he has been working with Emma Simpkins and others on compiling a regional threat list for the Auckland region which was published at the end of last year.

Recently Ewen has been helping us with our project to establish self-sustaining wildflower meadows at the Gardens. He has been visiting the wonderful meadows at Waikumete Cemetery for more than

40 years, and his wealth of knowledge is proving invaluable. His wife Cheryl has also been helping out, digging up wildflower plants from her own garden for us to introduce here.

Although retired, Ewen will not be a stranger at the Museum where I am sure his contribution will be as highly valued as always.

Jack Hobbs

## New library books

Book purchases approved at the August 2023 meeting of the Library Committee. These have now arrived.

*Garden Styles: a Book of Ideas.*  
Text by Heidi Howcroft and photographs by Marianne Majerus. 2023.

*Plants of the Qur'ān: History and Culture.*  
Text by Shahina A. Ghazanfar, illustrations by Sue Wickison. 2023.

Sue Wickison is a botanical artist who now lives on Waiheke. Her work was described by Bee Dawson in an article, "In fine detail", in the *Listener*, 9 September 2023. "Listener" ([suewickison.com](http://suewickison.com)).

## Friends subscription reminder

Friends membership subscriptions for the 2023/2024 financial year are now well overdue. Renewal forms were included in the June issue of this newsletter, *The Auckland Garden*.

Subscriptions can be paid either by eftpos or cash at the Visitor Centre or by direct deposit: ASB 123011 0757619 00.

Please put your name on the bank transfer and indicate that this is a membership renewal.

# Spring bus trip

We set off south on a balmy day without a breath of wind, our countryside looking bountiful in its full flush of spring best. The roadside became ordered, well maintained, beautifully treed as the lane approached Moondance Manor Garden near Hamilton. Our host awaited us at the driveway and we all strolled down the drive towards the charming manor house to be beset with a breathtaking vista of the garden spread before us framed all about with tall trees. Whichever way you looked there was perfection. Weeds have been long banned here.

Our host chatted into his tiny microphone as we progressed along down the various levels. We learned the garden has been developed along the lines of an English Country Garden with symmetry foremost in mind and with more than a nod to Gertrude Jekyll. White Iceberg roses framed the flowering areas, some as rows of standard roses. Colourful borders featured Manet-style though in various shades of colour rather than in single shades. Planting ranged from low to foxglove height.

We processed through the various "rooms" of the garden from the front room, through the croquet room, the private room where you cannot be seen from any direction, and other rooms on down the wide graceful lawn walks to the river. Although we couldn't yet see the river at the bottom of the garden, we were told it was there. What a sight that will be when the hydrangeas bloom. Often you thought that "What a sight that will be when the ? is blooming". Or "Oh

I've missed the ? flowering". It is a garden for many seasons.

You stroll back past the small vegetable plots and the swimming pool and up over to the lily pond drawn by the splashing of the fountain. The pond is beautifully set down below with goldfish lazily floating along among the waterlilies. It is surrounded with roses, bog primroses and so many other pretty plants. The finale is being invited to inspect the extensive tidy toolshed. Hospitality is utmost with Jeanette and Stephen Williams and we are treated to fruit drinks before we leave. It is a shock to re-enter the untidy world of reality.

A short drive takes us to the Taitua Arboretum which is quite the opposite in nature being a freely treed and meadow area with gravel paths, water meandering and uneven ground. Poultry wanders and of course birdsong accompanies. There are lots of places we can have our lunch and stroll or just rest. A stand of bamboo is a delight and also the sight of actual cork trees thriving in New Zealand.

Another short drive brings us to Woodlands Estate. This is a Category One Historic Place Heritage NZ. We self-guide randomly through the Five Star Garden of significance following our whims and excited advice from others we meet enroute. The imposing presence of a number of exotic massive trees planted mid 1800 is fascinating. The wisteria trunk is truly enormous. Around the lake the azaleas are on fire in orange and gold. The old-fashioned roses and the irises abound



in natural swathes. Various rooms again are bounded by hedges and delight with tall older trees underplanted with hostas, hellebores, hydrangeas differently as you enter each one. The homestead itself is open to the public.

On we go again for a very short distance to Wairere Nursery which has an imposing red rose and topiarised frontage arresting attention. Unusual plants and especially copious roses are available here. Such a display of roses in full bloom! Nursery

was so busy we took self-guided tours of the nursery gardens. Half an hour's stroll took you along immaculate areas showcasing many of the plants available thriving in a variety of suitable situations. You could walk down and around the watery areas and along under the canopy of established trees always entertained by the variety of different plantings.

An hour's return drive along the expressway gave us the opposite view of the sights and sculptures along the way.

Barbara Harvey

## Citrus recommendations

About twelve years ago a decision was taken to remove part of the spring blossom cherry grove and replace it with fruit trees suited to growing in Auckland's climate and soil conditions. Now, over a decade since the orchard was first planted, Auckland's warming climate in recent times has given us cause to reevaluate what we are growing.

Subtropicals are becoming more and more in vogue for obvious reasons, with citrus being one group of plants that we are looking at expanding the range of oranges, mandarins, limes and lemons amongst others. Criteria that we want to assess the trees for are pest and disease resistance, ease of maintenance and fruiting quality and quantity.

Citrus have been a key part of most Kiwi backyards for many generations. Whether they are used as a lawn specimen, a container plant or in a garden bed with

other plants, they are not only productive but also aesthetically appealing. Those grafted onto trifoliata rootstock produce medium to large trees, while those on Flying Dragon rootstock produce smaller trees.

Some citrus are susceptible to various ailments such as citrus tree borer, verrucosis and sooty mould though, and so you do need to be careful as to which types you choose to grow. Issues can vary across different types of citrus and can require a spraying regime, in order to keeping the trees looking at their best for large parts of the year.

Citrus require regular applications of fertiliser in spring through autumn, to reduce nutrient deficiency which can become evident when the trees are setting fruit. Mulching is also beneficial.

Based on what we have growing in the

Orchard currently the cultivars we can recommend to home gardeners include the following.

- *Citrus sinensis* 'Navelina' – orange
- *Citrus reticulata* 'Clementine' –

mandarin

- *Citrus aurantiifolia* 'Bears' – lime
- *Citrus xparadisi* 'Golden Special' – grapefruit
- *Citrus xmeyeri* – lemon

Shaun Rice

## Searching plants online

Digitisation has made available many rare florilegia and botanical and horticultural texts. Only a few years ago a good excuse for an overseas trip was the need to look at books in one of the great botanical libraries such as the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society in London or the library of the Arnold Arboretum in Boston. Now, much is available at the click of the computer mouse. This doesn't replace the thrill of being able to turn the pages of a centuries-old florilegium but it is certainly much easier – and a good way of filling in a wet Sunday afternoon.

A few years ago, I was lucky enough to be able to buy a print of a lily (see inside back cover). The print had an inscription in Latin: *Lilium foliis sparsis, multiflorum, floribus reflexis, fundo aureo ...*, a polynomial descriptive phrase rather than a Linnean binomial. Typing this into Google quickly brought up the image in a copy held in Madrid of Dr Christoph Trew's *Plantae Selectae ...*, a florilegium which contains a hundred hand-coloured engravings published between 1750 and 1773. The engravings are based on watercolours by Georg Dionysus Ehret. The plants are mainly introductions to Europe, especially from North America.

Another search inputting "Ehret lily colour engraving" confirmed that it was indeed an engraving by Johann Jacob Haid from a watercolour by Ehret of *Lilium superbum* L. often known as the Turk's cap lily or American tiger lily. (The image reproduced on the inside back cover is available at [www.plantillustrations.org/illustration.php?id.illustration=%2058509](http://www.plantillustrations.org/illustration.php?id.illustration=%2058509), accessed 2 October 2023).

The specific epithet *superbum* seems very appropriate as this lily can reach over nine feet (2.8 m) with at least 20 flowers. It occurs in eastern United States from New Hampshire and New York south to Louisiana and eastwards as far as Indiana, Illinois and Arkansas. It grows mainly in wet soggy areas such as swamp edges or the sides of streams. The flowers are in shades of orange, sometimes approaching red-orange, with maroon or purple spots.

Further searching on Google showed that *Lilium superbum* first flowered in England in August 1738 in the garden of Peter Collinson, a wholesale woollen draper and very keen gardener of Peckham, now south-east London. Ehret apparently prepared several almost identical paintings. One of these paintings, a

watercolour on vellum, is now held in the Victoria and Albert Museum (American Turk's-cap lily (*Lilium superbum*) | Ehret, Georg Dionysus | V&A Explore The Collections (vam.ac.uk). According to one report, a second painting was used to prepare the plate illustrated was published in 1751 as tab. XI in the second part (decuria) of *Plantae Selectae*. This second painting is now supposed to be lost, possibly, as was often the case at the printer's or when the engravings were coloured. I am not convinced; the watercolour at the Victoria and Albert is remarkably similar to the final engraving, apart from the inscription and the anthers being possibly more prominent. The colours are also somewhat different but both the watercolour and the prints are more than 250 years old and colours may have changed over this time.

Ehret was possibly the greatest botanical artist of the 18th century. *Plantae Selectae* has sometimes described as the finest botanical book ever published in Germany and the plant of the *Lilium* is amongst the finest in the book, it really is magnificent. Nevertheless, many of the plates hardly do justice to Ehret's paintings. Even very good engravers such as Haid cannot replicate the subtlety of the painting and the colouring of the plates was a constant problem. Karin Nickelsen (The challenge of colour: eighteenth-century botanists and the hand-colouring of illustrations. *Annals of Science* 1 (2006): 3–23.) has an irresistible quote demonstrating the difficulties. A very grumpy Dr Trew wrote in 1751 to the publisher of *Plantae Selectae* about the colour proofs of the second decuria: "Without even looking at the enclosed original, I knew it would need changes made to it. ... nothing remains to be censured but simply everything. The

illuminist must have done this at night, or in his sleep or while drunk, or must suffer from a considerable defect of the eyes. Otherwise he could not have mutilated it more ..." No wonder it took more than 20 years to publish the 100 plates of *Plantae Selectae*.

The full bibliographic details in [plantillustrations.org](http://plantillustrations.org) allowed me to find the text accompanying the plate. This was in Biodiversity Heritage Library, which has online more than 300,000 volumes with 61 million pages digitized from various natural history volumes.

Plant illustrations.org is a great resource and easy to use being indexed by both scientific and vernacular names. Entering "Lilium superbum" brings up more than 20 images from various florilegia (even if a few are rather dubious). The bibliographic details then allow a search on Biodiversity Heritage Library works to get any text. Plantillustrations.org is not as comprehensive as *Index Londinensis* which brings up at least 50 illustrations of the lily. Of course, pictures are far more useful than words, particularly as *Index Londinensis* is purely a bibliographic reference with no further details. Pictures are much more fun! Many New Zealand plants are featured in [plantillustrations.org](http://plantillustrations.org). There are 21 entries for *Sophora tetraptera* (kowhai), 11 for *Clianthus puniceus* (kowhai ngutukaka), 38 for *Phormium tenax* (flax), 6 for *Dicksonia squarrosa*, 8 for *Corynocarpus laevigatus* (karaka).

Many organisations also have parts of their collections online. In my reading I have, for example, used the Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University digitisation of many of the photographs of the great plant

collector, E.H. Wilson and the British Museum has online their collection of nearly a thousand “paper mosaicks” of Mary Delany. These are all readily found. The important thing is to try different combinations of words while searching.

Sometimes, however, inside knowledge is required. I was interested in John Miller’s *Icones Novae* of 1780, seven wonderful plates including the first-ever published coloured illustrations of New Zealand plants, kowhai and flax. This is an extraordinarily rare publication that I had once seen at Kew and I was able to look at it again only when a librarian at the Lindley Library emailed me saying that the Real Jardin Botanico of Madrid had long ago bound their copy of *Icones Novae* as an addendum into John Miller’s *Illustratio Systematis Sexualis Linnaei* and that the whole volume was available online.

I am particularly interested in different aspects of horticultural history but there are many online sources for those who simply want to grow plants. A good example is Treesandshrubsonline from the International Dendrological Society (IDS). The aim was to prepare a modern, web-based encyclopedia of woody plants hardy in the temperate parts of the world. It is based on *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles* by W.J. Bean and hence there is emphasis on plants growing in the United Kingdom. However, it is being updated more generally and I was particularly impressed by the descriptions of magnolia cultivars, including many raised in New Zealand. A full set of the volumes of Bean would cost many hundreds of dollars whereas the IDS version is available free online.

Ross Ferguson

## *Flora: celebrating our botanical world*

This is the title of a new book from Te Papa Press, launched in early November. I haven’t seen it yet but the flyer <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/about/te-papa-press/contact-te-papa-press/all-books-z/art-books/flora-celebrating-our-botanical> indicates the wealth of illustrations, from a delightful Canton silk scarf to paintings by Nancy Adams and Ida Else to a wonderful cashmere cape with Arabic-style carnations and irises to a woodcut by Mervyn Taylor of clover and plantains.

The advertising blurb says: “This big, glorious book mines Te Papa’s collections

to explore and expand on the way we think about our botanical world and its cultural imprint. A true treasure, it features over 400 selections by an expert, cross-disciplinary museum curatorial team that range from botanical specimens and art to photography, furniture, tivaevae, applied art, textiles, stamps and more.

*Flora’s* twelve essays provide a deeper contextual understanding of different topics, including the unique characteristics of the New Zealand flora as well as how artists and cultures have used flora as a motif and a subject over time.”

452 pages, \$80. Ideal for Christmas.



# A journey through gardens of north-east America

"You've come a long way from home!" was a line often repeated by visitors when they heard me talk. Indeed, I had. It was near the height of summer and visitors were flocking to the beautiful Chanticleer Gardens, often called "one of America's most exciting, imaginative and romantic gardens." I had the pleasure of working here for two weeks and interacted with many of the visiting public. Like me, they were always curious about the plants. I deferred many of the garden questions to the staff, learnt the answers for my next visitor interaction and mulled over how to politely say "Dammit, I'm not from Australia."

Working here was an inspiration and an eye opener. From beginning as a private estate garden in 1913, Chanticleer opened as a public garden in 1993 and has never

New York Botanic Gardens with conservatory in the background

looked back. It has modernised some of the existing historic gardens such as a vegetable growing area, terraces and tennis courts and added new ones such as an Asian woodland, the snaking "elevated walkway" and "the ruin" (a daring garden which deliberately turned one of the houses on-site into a tranquil garden "ruin"). I got to work in all 15 garden rooms, enjoying them all.

While there were some plants that were familiar, there were so many that were new to me. This part of America is whole-heartedly embracing the use of their native plants and a naturalistic, meadow or prairie-inspired style is softly woven through many gardens. Yet tucked in there were touches of New Zealand native plants used for textural contrast such as vibrant *Phormium*, soft

Jeffery Jones working at Chanticleer



*Carex* grasses and tumbling masses of *Muehlenbeckia axillaris*. There is an exciting experimentation of unusual plant combinations which is also challenging. Some of this includes using subtropicals, but unlike Auckland where plants such as palms, cannas, alocasia, yuccas and agaves can be kept outdoors, these plants are all carefully lifted and stored in glasshouses away from the harsh winter weather. It is a real labour of love for the gardeners, but the inspiring plantings are worth it for them and the public.

The garden staff at Chanticleer are not only extremely knowledgeable about plants and garden design but they also showcase their creative flair through the built parts of the garden – much of the paving, step handrails, gates, seats and tables are all crafted by the staff in the winter months when the garden is blanketed in snow and closed to the public. It lends a real artistry to all parts of Chanticleer.

Located on the outskirts of Philadelphia City, Chanticleer is one of 30 gardens all within an hour drive of each other. It makes Philadelphia the “garden capital of America.” I visited a few of these places such as Nemours Estate, a formal French-style garden and grand mansion which wouldn't look out of place in 19th century rural France. Next was a tranquil retreat to Mt Cuba, an inspiring native American plants-only garden, then a walk through the very English-style meadows and specimen trees of Stoneleigh Gardens. At Morris Arboretum I stood in awe under America's largest *Katsura* tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*) and walked amongst the tops of American oaks in their treetop walkway. I shouldn't forget to mention America's most well-known

show garden: Longwood. The grandeur of the place is right up there with some of the famous gardens of the world and perhaps even Disneyland-like with its fountain displays, grand conservatories, and tree avenues. But there were also rustic vegetable gardens, old-world flower borders and a large meadow to get lost in for quieter and naturalistic moments. America's garden capital really does have it all and I would recommend going there for the sheer variety of garden types and design inspiration.

For those that like apples, there is no bigger bite to eat than the Big Apple itself: New York. The sometimes-overwhelming mass of people – a city with twice the population of New Zealand – was tempered with little moments of nature. Visiting the High Line was to experience the wild success of people wanting to visit nature – a novel experience of an elevated ex-railway line threading through tall office skyscrapers and honking yellow taxi cabs below. Here the humble echinacea plant was celebrated, one could enjoy respite from the summer heat under small shade trees while birds and bees flitted around. It was also nice to see large display signs acknowledging the gardeners who looked after this highly urban garden: sometimes the public seem to take for granted the hard work skilled gardeners undertake to create such garden magic.

In a city this big, they have not one but two botanic gardens, each with its own character and history. New York Botanic Gardens has an interesting perennial garden (designed and still collaboratively overseen by an 84-year-old fine-arts-painter-turned-gardener) and impressive glasshouses. I thoroughly enjoyed the compact and seamless layout of the

Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, which felt more boutique. Like Chanticleer, there was thought as to how the gardens flowed into each other and the structural elements such as buildings and large specimen trees.

While my top trip highlight was working at Chanticleer, another highlight was the gardens of Chicago. Did you know that the motto for Chicago is "Urbs in Horto" ("City in a Garden")? More well-known for its gang history, the Great Fire, Oprah Winfrey, and the heart attack that is their famous deep-dish pizza, who knew? But scratch under the surface and there are amazing gardens to visit. The Lurie Garden, a Piet Oudolf-designed downtown garden is a place of tranquillity. With over 35,000 perennial plants, and a large beech and hornbeam hedge hugging you in, this place made you forget you were in the middle of a city of 5 million. Such was the nature; you could almost touch the monarch butterflies flying about or drown out the traffic with the buzzing of the bees. There was even a sign in the middle cautioning visitors that foxes were living here! It made it even more surreal to think this garden is part of the world's largest green roof.

In a country full of "world's biggest", I was pleasantly surprised at visiting the rather underrated Garfield Park Conservatory, America's "largest botanical conservatory". Over 8000 square metres in size, there is one of the most diverse palm collections I have seen, an immensely lush lagoon fernery "taking you back to prehistoric Illinois" (when it was apparently a rocky swamp covered in fern), a prickly desert house and a fun children's garden. Many of the world's plants and different habitats are captured under one roof which makes

this a remarkable city greenspace to visit. And lastly, Chicago Botanic Gardens. I haven't visited many botanic gardens around the world, but surely there are not many based on nine islands in a large lake. This made it a unique garden to visit, island-hopping to the different themed gardens. I met the various gardeners and was awed to learn how they grow plants so well in so much clay soil (a lot of sand and money) and how they maintain such high horticultural standards over a large 436-hectare site (by having 400 staff). One little moment I had here was walking around the beautifully realistic Japanese garden and momentarily forgetting I was in Chicago (the American accents soon brought me back to reality). Visiting here was seeing a botanic garden on steroids - different from the steroidal impressiveness of Longwood - as it had education, research, plant trials and conservation on prime display.

Near the end of my trip while walking in downtown Chicago I stopped in surprise: planted amongst the vibrant, colourful street plantings was a contrast plant poking up and out - the unmistakable strappy leaves of cabbage tree seedlings. This plant was a long way from home! Yet it added a little interesting garden moment to the passersby. And just like that unlikely plant moment I hope to bring some of that here - look out for some interesting plant and garden design at Auckland BG as I come back inspired.

A trip like this is the sum of its parts: there was so much to learn, see and do. I am grateful for the experience and opportunity - a big thank you to the Friends of the Botanic Gardens for the Buchanan Award to make this trip possible.

# Curious *Chimonanthus*

When visiting gardens I always find myself drawn to scented plants. As I have been curating the Magnolia Garden for a relatively short time, I am still finding out about various plants in the collection. Recently I discovered the scented plant genus *Chimonanthus*. I had been cutting back some overgrown branches of *Chimonanthus zhejiangensis* that were close to the path, and realised the leaves smelt like a pleasant version of insect repellent. This naturally made me want to find out more about the plant, so I did some research.

The genus *Chimonanthus* ("winter flower" in Greek) is commonly known as (and aptly named) wintersweet and is part of the Calycanthaceae family. It is native to China. While it was the scented leaves that initially interested me, it is the small waxy yellow or white winter flowers that smell slightly spicy and sweet that its common name is based on. *Chimonanthus* species are hardy deciduous shrubs that get to about 3 m high and are arching and vase-like. They flower on new growth from May to spring before the new leaves appear, but they may take several years to flower when young or if cut back hard. The leaves are dark green in summer and turn a buttery yellow in autumn. They need little pruning apart from removing dead, diseased or crossed-over branches, or some old branches after flowering in late winter or early spring. *Chimonanthus* grow best in a warm, sheltered sunny position with free-draining soil and moderate water requirements. They can be drought tolerant once established.

Plants can be propagated from seed or by layering.

*Chimonanthus* flowers are used for floral arrangements in winter. The flowers are edible if boiled and washed and eaten with salt and oil. They have also been used to flavour and scent tea. Dried flower sprigs can be used to perfume linen cupboards. They are also used in perfume, potpourri, cosmetics and medicine. Medicinal uses of flowers include treatment for thirst and depression; essential oils for treating colds. Leaves and roots have been used for treatment of cuts, haemorrhages, strains, rheumatism and colds. In China, *Chimonanthus* species have been cultivated since the 11th century. It is desirable to plant them near to the house so the scent can be appreciated.

At Auckland Botanic Gardens we are growing two species and a cultivar; *C. zhejiangensis* which has pale yellow flowers, *C. praecox*, and the cultivar *C. praecox* 'Luteus', a yellow cultivar that is less fragrant than the species.

Andrea Wright

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## References:

- Chimonanthus* - Wikipedia
- Chimonanthus praecox* Winter Sweet PFAF Plant Database
- Chimonanthus praecox* | Wintersweet – Puriri Lane @ Addenbrooke (puririlaneaddenbrooke.co.nz)



# *Anthurus archeri* – the Devil's fingers

Recently I learnt two new words. *Sapromyophilous* flowers attract carrion and dung flies through production of volatiles used by flies as cues to locate rotting carrion, faeces or urine. *Sapromyophily* is not just restricted to angiosperms but is also found in fungi and even some mosses.

Most of us know the White Basket fungus, *Ileodictyon cibarium*, which has a fruiting body up to 20 cm in diameter, a spherical network of arms with foul-smelling slime with spores covering the insides of the arms. As in other stinkhorn fungi, the fungal spores are often consumed by flies along with the exudate (gleba) and germinate once they have passed through the digestive system of the flies. Otherwise, the spores may simply be carried on the body of the flies.

Another equally foul smelling and even more sinister-looking fungus, *Anthurus archeri*, is particularly abundant in the Epsom garden of Sue Davison. It is commonly known as the Devil's Fingers. *A. archeri* is a saprophyte so it is found where there is decaying vegetation such as leaf litter or mulch. In Sue's garden it has turned up where she had established a thick layer of mulch. A fungal "egg" forms in the litter layer and then elongated arms erupt. These are orange red owing to the presence of carotenoids. Chemical analysis has shown that the odour of *A. archeri* is intermediate between that of rotten meat and dog faeces and it attracts flies. Not surprisingly, there are no records of human consumption.

*A. archeri* was first described from Australia but is spreading throughout the world. The form in Auckland is particularly large with arms divided into two limbs which are initially fused at the top but then usually separate. Colonies are often seen at Cornwall Park and are described in the new book *Nature in the City*. It is possible that the Park was the source of spores that have grown in Sue's garden.

*Anthurus archeri* is often confused with *Aseroe rubra*, and according to mycologists from Landcare Research it is difficult to tell the two apart.

For more details see Cooper, J. (2020) The Phallales (stinkhorns) in *New Zealand. Mycological Notes* 41. (2020-MycNotes41-Phallales.pdf accessed 12 October 2023)

Ross Ferguson

Photograph: Anna Davison





Clockwise  
from top left:  
A colourful border at  
Moondance Manor,  
*Lilium superbum* from  
*Plantae Selectae*,  
*Clivia*.





*Prunus 'Awanui'*



Auckland Botanic Gardens: [botanic.gardens@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:botanic.gardens@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)  
Friends: [friendsofabg@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofabg@gmail.com)