



Winter 2004

# SUBTROPICALS



# SUBTROPICALS

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

WINTER 2004

Volume 3 Number 2

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**SPRING ISSUE  
COPY DEADLINE**

**All copy must be received by the 31<sup>ST</sup> August 2004**

## **(THE) coming event.**

For the **SUBTROPICALS** Society these are the most important dates in the year – the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of June.

On these two days we hold the second of our conferences and show/sales. This year however, the sale/show has grown to a two day affair being held in the rather large ASB Stadium at Kohimaramara. The increased space has allowed us to include an exhibition of outdoor sculpture and a café that will, we hope, make this a winter season event worth attending each year.

There are still a few seats available at the conference so, if you wish to attend, please return the form included in this issue as soon as possible so the catering arrangements can be confirmed.

Some exciting plants are being brought to the sale from as far away as Kaitaia, Whakatane and New Plymouth – including new cultivars and species.

To make this show a success, we need volunteers to help man (!) the doors, plant crèche, eftpos and society stands on both the Saturday and Sunday. If you can help, even for a couple of hours, please let us know.

Inside this issue there is a poster which we would like you to place in a prominent position somewhere – in your car window might be a good idea (not if it is in the garage!) The postcard is for you to send or give to someone you feel would be interested. To make the show a success we need **LOTS** of people to come.

**Marjorie Lowe**  
**Editor**

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# FRONT COVER STORY

## *Tibouchina granulosa*

**Russell Fransham**

Autumn colour is often thought of as that created by the changing colours of the dying leaves of deciduous plants, but in northern New Zealand the autumn palette has a much broader range with many evergreen flowering subtropicals to choose from. In recent years, a splashy new entrant in the autumn colour stakes has been spreading its gaudy dazzle through our warmer gardens. It is *Tibouchina granulosa* from Brazil and Bolivia – sometimes called the Glory Bush or Purple Glory Tree.

The shrubby, multi-stemmed tibouchinas with big, purple buttercup flowers that seem forever to be breaking their leggy branches were known for many years as lasiandras. However, this new (to us) tibouchina grows more like a small tree (up to three or four metres), with a definite trunk and a more elegant, sturdy structure. The autumn flowers are much smaller and smother the tree in 30cm terminal panicles, opening rich purple, then fading to a softer mauve so that both shades occur at once. This sumptuous display goes on and on through early winter in a frost-free spot. Often mine will continue through winter until July or even early spring in August.

The distinctive, drooping leaves are long and deeply veined in a dark, velvety green that makes a great background for the spectacle of the massed flowers. At the peak of flowering, the leaves almost disappear under them.

---

### Front cover -

Looking from the lake edge up the slope, a *Tibouchina granulosa* 'Rosea' is flanked by the taller purple/mauve species to the right with, to the left, a young *Schizolobium parahybum* (see page 7). The young palm below is *Brahea armata*. No photograph taken in Russell Fransham's garden would be complete without birds on view!

### Inside front cover:

Top - *Tibouchina lepidota* 'Alstonville' photographed in the gardens of the Whangarei District Offices and theatre complex known as 'Forum North'.

Bottom - Closer view of *T. granulosa* 'Rosea' showing the large terminal panicles.

**Photos: Russell Fransham**

Just recently a pink form, *T. granulosa* 'Rosea', has been appearing in nurseries here. It seems to grow less vigorously but is otherwise similar to the purple *T. granulosa*. The flowers start several weeks earlier and, when they open, they are a rich deep pink (like the purple species), fade to a softer, paler shade. It is strange that this pink form should still be so uncommon here because it has, for years, been a major component of Sydney's autumn colour scheme, just as jacarandas are the dominating feature of its spring gardens.

One thing that all tibouchinas need is full sun. When young they are frost tender, much like the other lasiandras. Similarly, they are brittle and prone to breaking in the wind. However, they have a remarkable ability to re-grow from ground level after being snapped off and consequently respond well to hard pruning.

While muted, cool colours are generally the basis of the atmosphere of tranquillity in a garden, I have increasingly become convinced that there is also a need for a touch of loud and trashy spectacle somewhere in the garden - an outdoor equivalent of the rumpus room, where you want a bit of seasonal, high energy razzle-dazzle. Imagine using *Robinia frisia* massed behind a group of Glory Bush. Pink and gold could look as wonderful together as the purple and gold. You could even grow a mass of pink or dark red iresine around and under your tibouchinas as a way of really turning up the bass.

## ***Tibouchina lepidota* 'Alstonville'**

Also known as Glory Bush (like *T. granulosa*), the species is a bushy shrub usually growing to 3 or 4 metres. In its native habitat in Ecuador and Colombia it can become a small tree.

The cultivar 'Alstonville' is a spectacular, free flowering small tree. It was named for the small New South Wales town of Alstonville where it is planted as a street tree in every avenue, road and street. It provides a winter-long, stunning sight that rivals Grafton's famous spring flowering jacarandas. There is also a variegated form with green and cream foliage.

The photograph (top, inside cover) shows a small corner of the gardens at Forum North that I designed and planted in 1998. Just visible top left is a portion of a large, four-faced ceramic and wood sculpture. The iresine is, of course, always a warming sight - but when the tibouchina is in full flower as well, the result is definitely a showstopper.

Other worthwhile tibouchinas include the large-leaved *T. heteromalla* and the old favourite *T. urvilleana* (Princess Flower). The all year flowering form sold as 'Edwardsii' is now listed as *T. urvilleana* 'Edward 11'.

# BRAZILIAN FERN TREE, YELLOW JACARANDA (or TOWER TREE)

**Robin Booth**

One of our most dramatic-growing trees at Wharepuke is the Brazilian Fern Tree, named because the huge jacaranda-like leaves resemble tree fern leaves. It is a native of the area from tropical Brazil to southern Mexico, where it is called Bacarubu or Guapuruvu. Scientifically, it is called *Schizolobium parahybum* and belongs to the Legume family (Caesalpiniaceae).

In the wild this tree is one of the first to grow away when a mature tree falls in the forest. It is a fast grower that tends not to branch for the first few years or until it reaches about six metres. This allows it to take advantage of the light available. Being a legume means that it fixes nitrogen in the soil, which helps it to grow strongly.

The bipinnate leaves are up to two metres long and, interestingly, tend to be a little sticky. The tree is deciduous for about six weeks from late winter. Then the new leaves start unfurling, giving a 'Dr Zeus' feeling to the end of the branches.

This year, my ten-year-old tree carried its first flowers. They were on the highest branch nearly hidden from view. The yellow flowers are borne on spikes which stand above the foliage, although some pictures I have seen show the flowers appearing before the leaves so there seems to be some variability in the species (some *Cieba speciosa*). The showy flowers are a good source of nectar and are supposed to be scented. I hope the tuis find them attractive.

With time, buttress roots form at ground level. The whitish-yellow wood is light and is used for paper manufacture, joinery, etc. I find that a free-draining soil is best; a tree on my heavier soil doesn't do anywhere nearly so well. *S. parahybum* will stand light frosts (Zones 10-12).

Some references say the tree is brittle but I haven't found it particularly so, though vigorous new growths in the spring can get blown off in a storm

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Some people may not want a tall (to 30 metres in habitat) tree but want to enjoy the huge leaves. This is easily achieved by cutting the tree to ground level when it reaches the maximum height you want. It then grows away very quickly giving you that lovely effect with its new leaves.

A very sculptural tree for the garden, it does give high, light shade and other plants are happy growing under it. This is a tree I would recommend if you have the space.

---

## ***Dendrobium thyrsiflorum***

### **Jonathan Voysey**

Some time ago I was speaking to an experienced orchid grower about growing orchids outside in Auckland. Living in a frosty area himself, he refused to believe it was possible, despite many people having grown cymbidiums, dendrobiums, epidendrums, oncidiums and more for years.

Gardeners are discovering that there is a whole new plant world out there and they are using epiphytic plants to make the most of what are nowadays very small gardens. The myths surrounding orchid growing have made people believe that they are difficult to grow. Some are rare, some are tender and others may be difficult to grow but many are easily found, many grow in (relatively) cool conditions and yet more are very easy to grow once you discover their requirements.

***Dendrobium thyrsiflorum*** is a cool growing, evergreen, epiphytic orchid from India, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and China. The racemes, crowded with white flowers with golden lips, hang down in profusion on a well-grown plant. The ponga logs opposite, many of them sprouting, are concealing a concrete water tank. Russell Hutton, an expert orchidist, has added other ferns and orchids and the good light, air movement and time have resulted in this amazing sight. Unfortunately the flowers are short-lived but spectacular while they last.

---

#### **Top:**

**Looking up to the canopy of a young *Schizolobium parahybum* with its very first flower. There are, I am told, some mature specimens in the Royal Oak, Auckland area that are magnificent in flower. Will try to photograph them next flowering season.**

**Inset: close-up of flower.**

**Photos: Robin Booth**

#### **Bottom:**

**A stunning clump of *Dendrobium thyrsiflorum* growing as an epiphyte on a ponga log screen at cool Tuakau.**

**Photo: Russell Hutton**







# WINTER FLOWERING CLIVIA

**Keith Hammett**

Less can often be more. This is certainly the case with plants that flower at times of the year when relatively few other plants are in bloom. I certainly tend to enjoy individual plants and blooms more when not overwhelmed by a plethora of other flowers.

Within the genus *Clivia*, the late spring/early summer flowering *C. miniata* is the best known. As this is one of the few really showy shade-loving plants, it is quite widely grown under trees in northern New Zealand where frosts are not too severe.

The most common form is a wild one typical of forms found in Natal. This has narrow leaves and pale orange flowers and has been grown in New Zealand for more than a century. So-called hybrids, variously styled Belgian, German, Japanese and Santa Barbara, have been imported and disseminated by the nursery industry within New Zealand for over fifty years. These are at best intra-specific hybrids based on broader-leaved accessions (new additions) of *C. miniata*. They usually have larger and stronger-coloured blooms and broad leaves.

More recently, yellow and peach coloured forms have become available. These have helped to stimulate interest in the genus with *Clivia* clubs and societies being formed in South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and North America.

*Clivia* is a small genus confined to southern Africa. It consists of just six species, namely *C. nobilis*, *C. miniata*, *C. gardenii*, *C. caulescens*, *C. mirabilis* and *C. paludosa*. *C. miniata* is the only species to have large upright flowers; those of all the other species being tubular and pendulous.

Although *C. nobilis* was the first named taxon on which the genus is based, it is rare in cultivation and grows exceedingly slowly. In New Zealand the late autumn/early winter flowering *C. gardenii* has until recently almost invariably been wrongly identified as *C. nobilis*.

---

**Clockwise from top left:**

***Clivia gardenii***

***C. x cyrtanthiflora* flower head and berries**

***C. 'Winter Glory'* HR**

***C. x cyrtanthiflora* 2**

***C. 'Woodland Glory'* HR**

**Photos: Keith Hammett**

**[www.drkeithhammett.co.nz](http://www.drkeithhammett.co.nz)**

*C. gardenii* shows a range of variation in plant habit, flower form and colour. Some accessions show marked green zones around the apex of each tubular flower, some can be pale orange with minimal green, while yet others can approach yellow. Plants are recognisable by time of flowering (April-May), open inflorescences, somewhat curved flower tubes with strongly excised stigmas and stamens, and lax, acuminate leaves with very pale green, almost white, colouring on the undersurface.

Hybrid combinations between all known species are possible with very few, if any, breeding barriers. The first recorded hybrid within the genus is *C x cyrtanthiflora*. This was a combination of *C. nobilis* and *C. miniata* made in Belgium in the 1850s and named in 1869. This has become widely distributed in Australia and is quite common in New Zealand. Over time the original F1 hybrid has self-pollinated and populations now consist of varying mixtures of different generations. As a consequence there is quite a lot of variation in flower colour and form. Our Australian cousins have got into the habit of calling this complex “Oz nobilis”(sic).

Despite being a combination between two summer flowering species, *C x cyrtanthiflora* has a tendency in New Zealand to produce blooms erratically throughout the year, with not a few during the winter months.

The F1 combination, *C. miniata x C. gardenii*, normally flowers June-July in Auckland, although this year it is flowering from early May. Flowers are midway between its parents in form and presentation. They are more flared than those of *C. gardenii* and are half mast, being neither upright nor pendulous. We are selling this combination as “Winter Glory”.

As it is a combination of summer and winter flowering species, *C. caulescens x C. gardenii* flowers throughout the year. However, its *C. gardenii* component ensures that it produces plenty of good quality blooms during the winter months. We have found that this is an excellent landscape plant well able to suppress even aggressive weeds such as Wandering Jew. As it flowers throughout the year, it has the bonus of bearing berries at all stages of development, plus most attractive leaves. We make this hybrid available as “Woodland Glory”.

Although *Clivia* has been in cultivation for a century and a half, it is only relatively recently that interest has been taken in species other than *C. miniata*. It seems certain that, while *C. miniata* still has much to offer, it is the inter-specific hybrids that offer the greatest scope for innovation.

**Volunteers are needed for the show.**

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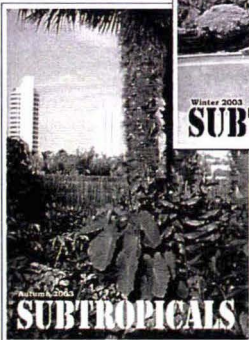
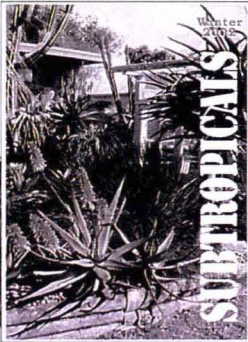
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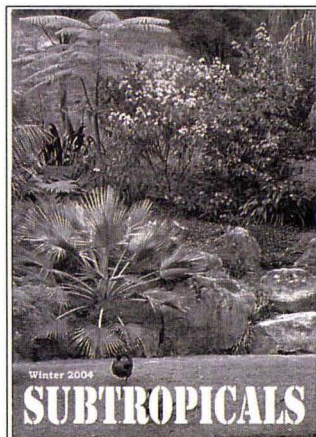
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# COMPETITION

And the winner of this issue's letter/photo competition is **Joyce Fox of Onewhero, Tuakau.**

She writes:

I found Dick Endt's letter on the effects of an 'inversion layer' (winter 2002 - Vol. 1/2) very interesting as we have the same situation.

We live sixty-five kilometres south of Auckland in the volcanic hills of Onewhero - altitude 213 metres. In twenty-eight years I have established two gardens. In this time I have grown tamarillos and subtropicals without any trouble and yet, at times, just below us the floor of the valley is white with frost, 1°C or below.

The photos enclosed are of my garden which is less than four years old. What do you do when you downsize your garden from one acre to one quarter that size? Because of my husband's illness at the time, mowing lawns was out.

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Five large beds were developed (no digging), using compost, horse and sheep manure, with pumice paths between. Cuttings were planted from the old garden – salvias, plectranthus, euphorbias, sedums, miscanthus and similar plants. I soon realised that, because of the shelter and full sun, it ended up like a jungle.

So the obvious plants were subtropicals and what a success they have been.

---

## ***Haemanthus albiflos*** **Jonathan Voysey**

**White Paintbrush**

Like *Haemanthus coccineus* (summer 2003), this subtropical bulb has a pair of broad, deep green, fleshy leaves from which the flower spike emerges. It is however (despite some sources describing it as seasonally dormant), fully evergreen in our climate. There are other differences. The leaves, while attractive, reach only about 30cm in length, but the plant multiplies much more quickly than *H. coccineus* and soon makes a generous clump. Planted closely, it would make a solid groundcover, almost impervious to weeds (but not snails and slugs). It flowers freely over a long period in autumn.

*H. albiflos* is native to eastern South Africa and Swaziland where it grows in shade in scrub and forest along the coast. There it flowers in autumn and winter and, although the plants take all year water, they will stand some drought. In northern New Zealand, *H. albiflos* will take part sun and will reputedly withstand temperatures down to 0°C if well drained. The long-lasting leaves can become a trifle tattered in time, so grooming of the older leaves will improve the appearance of the clump.

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**Top:**

**Photo: Joyce Fox**

Some of the planting (from left to right) *Ligularia dentata*, *Neoregelia cruenta* (bronze), papyrus, *Puya alpestris*, *Melianthus major* (although this is a very attractive plant with dramatic leaves it has been declared a noxious weed), *Neo. 'Superball'*, *Agave attenuata* (not seen – *Kalanchoe beharensis* against the blue screen), *Vriesea fosteriana* Rubra, *V. platynema variegata*, maple, *Astelia* bronze hybrid, *Scleranthus biflorus* and many bromeliads and ferns tucked in everywhere.

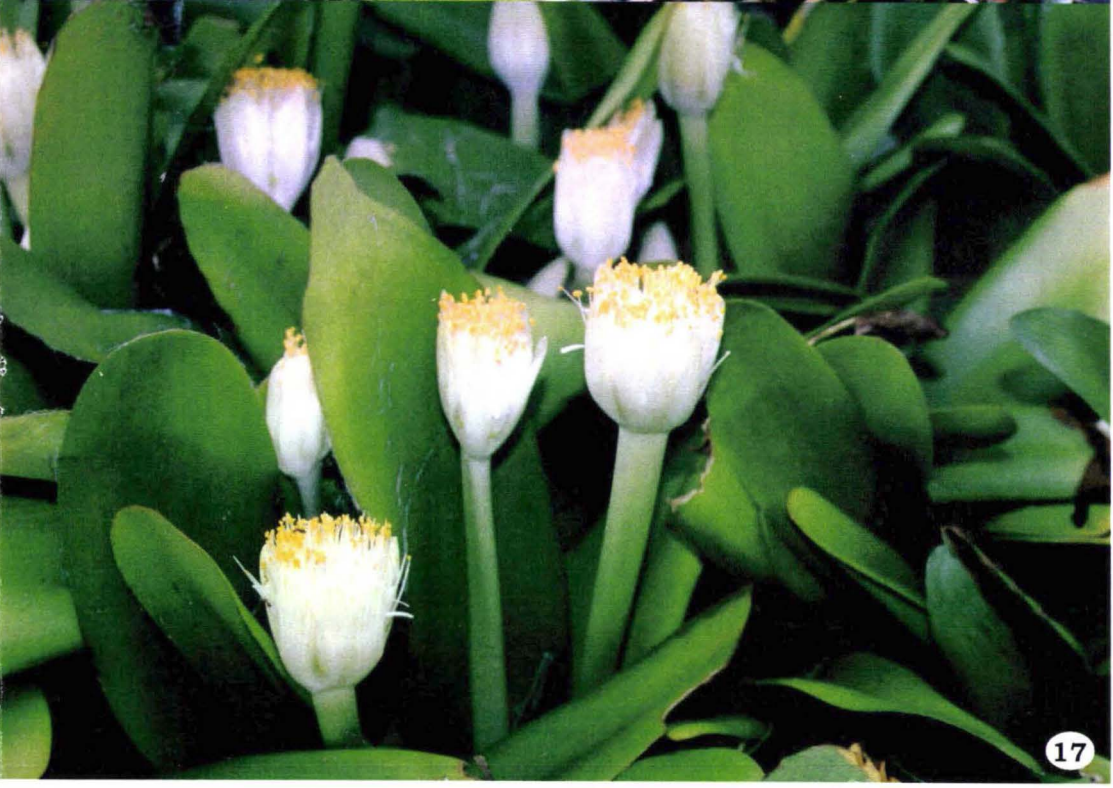
Despite the strong geometric form of the screen and plantbed, the design of the pool and its surrounds, together with the planting, has definitely achieved a feeling of 'outside the square'.

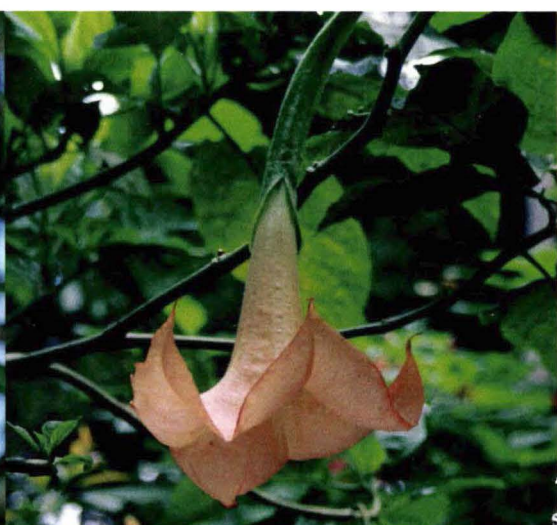
**Bottom:**

**Photo: Grant Bayley**

A corner of a large clump of *Haemanthus albiflos* photographed in the Auckland Domain.







# LOOKING UP, HANGING DOWN (1)

## BRUGMANSIAS

### Rosemary Steele

Angel's Trumpets, Daturas, or, more correctly, Brugmansia species are an important group of plants in our gardens, giving fast-growing height, colour and scent. The *Brugmansia* genus was separated from *Datura* in 1973, although the latter name is still widely and incorrectly used for both. There are two main differences: brugmansia flowers hang down, while datura flowers are upright (Devil's Trumpets); and the seedpods of brugmansia are smooth and fleshy, unlike the spiny 'Thorn Apples' of datura. Both genera contain a range of alkaloids, such as scopolamine (or hyoscine), hyoscyamine and atropine, and they have long been recognised for their medicinal and hallucinogenic properties. Although they are full of poisonous substances, so are many ornamental plants and edible ones such as rhubarb leaves and the green parts of tomatoes and potatoes. As we do not stop driving our cars just because some idiot may sniff petrol, so I believe we are justified in growing them in our gardens.

Brugmansia species are all found in South America. There are seven species commonly recognised as well as an enormous range of hybrids, both naturally occurring and man-made. Two of them are not in New Zealand as far as I know (*B. arborea* and *B. vulcanicola*), though I'd love to get them if you have them! The remainder, or at least hybrids derived from them, are all here.

At 'Nestlebrae' we have at least nine different varieties. It is sometimes difficult to identify them precisely but, armed with Ulrike and Hans-Georg Preissel's book 'Brugmansia and Datura: Angel's trumpets and Thorn apples' (reviewed in Subtropicals, spring 2002), I think I have worked them out.

---

**Clockwise from top left -**

***Brugmansia x candida flora plena* - double form**

***B. versicolor* - peach form from Dick Endt, a single flower was scenting a wide area.**

***B. versicolor* - pink form**

***B. aurea* - at 6-9 metres above, a telephoto lens was required.**

***B. sanguinea* - still with new flowers emerging.**

***B.* 'Butterscotch' - this particular form was propagated from a cutting from Nestlebrae's tall 'Butterscotch'. It has, however, developed a horizontal branching habit, under 2.5m high so far and the night-perfumed flowers appear in heavy flushes for most of the year.**

**Photos: (taken in late May)**

**Marjorie Lowe**

The tallest one we have reaches ten to twelve metres and is, I think, fairly close to *B. aurea* which, despite its name, can have golden yellow, apricot yellow, pink or white flowers. Ours has flowers that are white when they open but change as they age to a pale apricot shade. (Describing the subtle colours made me wish for a proper colour chart!) The flowers are 20cm long, flaring open at the mouth into 5 elongated reflexed points. The fruit are large, somewhat oval, 12cm long, and full of tightly packed corky seeds. As the outer walls rot away a delicate lacy skeleton is left and these are often picked up by floral artists for their work. It flowers almost all year so there are nearly always some flowers visible.

***B. suaveolens*** comes from coastal rainforests in SE Brazil and has 30cm long, pure white flowers, which flare out from a narrow base, and long spindle-shaped seed pods. It only grows three to four metres tall and, as you might expect, is somewhat more frost tender. 'Suaveolens' means fragrant, though I do not think it is as intensely scented as some of the other species.

***B. versicolor*** comes from the tropical region of Ecuador and varies widely within its range, but is always distinguished by the length of the corolla tube (30-50cm), with the very long narrow tube of the basal part being clearly visible below the calyx. We have one form which opens white and then changes to pink, though other forms can be apricot, peach, pink or white. It flowers in distinct periods, giving a spectacular show of colour before stopping. Another form, that we obtained from Dick Endt, ages to a deep apricot.

***B. sanguinea*** was grown from seed we obtained from America and is, unlike the others discussed, much harder to grow from cuttings. Without cross-pollination it also seems reluctant to set seed. It has a wide range in nature: from northern Colombia to northern Chile, at altitudes of 2000-3000m, so is able to withstand several degrees of frost. It has the most easily recognisable flower shape: a long narrow tube which only widens at the mouth. It is the most brightly coloured species available here, usually being red or red and orange, though a pure yellow form, *B. sanguinea aurea*, is sometimes available.

Overseas you can get brilliant red, pink, orange and various shades of yellow. Others can be green at the base, yellow in the middle, and red or orange at the mouth. The Preissels say that the colour of the flowers varies with temperature, though I have not noticed this (something to look out for this winter, perhaps). The leaves are wavy margined and smaller than the other species, and our plants growing out in the open have formed densely branched rounded mounds perhaps no more than 2m tall. As far as I can tell the flowers are unscented.

As might be expected with such spectacular flowers there has been a great deal of hybridisation, much of it done in Germany where there seems to be a stunning selection of named hybrids available. I suspect that the variety available here as 'Noel's Blush' is a hybrid derived from several species (which would also explain why it hardly ever sets seed). Similarly, the variety 'Butterscotch' may well be a hybrid between *B. aurea* and *B. versicolor* (known as *B. x candida*). It has huge flowers 35cm long, flaring out to almost 30cm (tip to tip) at the mouth. The colour begins yellow and ages to deep orange. This has been further refined in New Zealand by breeder Brian Rathbone who has produced a larger, deeper coloured seedling he has called 'Rusty'.

One of the oldest hybrids available here is *B. x candida flora plena* which has pure white hose-in-hose double flowers. It is somewhat frost tender, and our original plant was killed back to ground level in the winter of 1994, though it regrew from the base. There is a stunning double hybrid of *B. versicolor* overseas called 'Herrenhäuser Gärten' but I don't suppose it (or any of the others) will ever become available here.

With the exception of *B. sanguinea* as mentioned above, all the brugmansias seem to grow easily from cuttings, especially those taken from near the tips of branches in flower. Growing from seed is also possible, but the seedlings will not necessarily be the same as the parent, though of course you may end up with an exciting new hybrid. Much more breeding needs to be done here so we can begin to have the range of hybrids already available overseas.

## WHAT'S ON

<b>June 13<sup>TH</sup></b> <b>Sunday</b> <b>11-1pm</b>	<b>DESIGN A SUCCULENT GARDEN</b> <b>Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens</b> <b>\$8.00 per person, no bookings required, goes ahead</b> <b>rain or shine, wear walking shoes</b>
<b>June 26<sup>TH</sup></b> <b>Saturday</b> <b>2:45</b>	<b>SUBTROPICALS Conference in the Redwood Lounge</b> <b>ASB Stadium, Kohimarama, Auckland. Doors open from</b> <b>2:15pm. (For members and their guests).</b>
<b>June</b> <b>26<sup>TH</sup> 27<sup>TH</sup></b> <b>Sat/Sun</b>	<b>SUBTROPICALS Exhibition and Plant Sale</b> <b>ASB Stadium. 9am to 2pm Open to the public.</b>
<b>July 4<sup>TH</sup></b> <b>Sunday</b> <b>11-1pm</b>	<b>TREES FOR THE BACKYARD</b> <b>Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens</b> <b>\$8.00 per person, no bookings required</b> <b>Enquiries (09) 267-1457</b>

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

In the spring 2003 issue of Subtropicals (Vol 2 No. 3), Rosemary Steele justifiably highlighted the virtues of *Montanoa bipinnatifida*, the Mexican Tree Daisy. As I write (late May), my plants are in advanced bud and the blooms will soon complement the various tree dahlia hybrids which I am developing.

In New Zealand we seem to have a single form of *Montanoa bipinnatifida*, presumably imported as vegetative material. As with many members of the Asteraceae, individual clones tend to be self-incompatible and therefore do not set seed unless there are unrelated genotypes around to pollinate them. For this reason *Montanoa bipinnatifida* is very well behaved in this country. In fact it takes a little effort and good timing to establish new plants from cuttings.

However, a few years ago I travelled to the Transkei in South Africa in order to better understand the Swamp Clivia, *C. paludosa*. In the Transkei there are several very aggressive introductions that are invading the indigenous vegetation. Several of these are from the New World, including *Montanoa bipinnatifida*. In the Transkei it is seeding freely and competing very successfully.

I do not think that we should become alarmed by this, especially if we bear in mind that the Pohutukawa, *Metrosideros excelsa*, has become a noxious weed in parts of South Africa and that the possum is protected in Australia. It might be wise not to import *Montanoa* as seed though.

This example does highlight the impracticability of being able to assess the weed potential of any proposed plant that has not previously been introduced to the country. We could very well have been denied a very welcome plant, especially at this time of the year.

**Keith Hammett**

## HIBISCUS

**In late June many hibiscus are still flowering, especially the older, dependable Fijian cultivars like *H.* 'D.J. O'Brien, usually about the last to finish.**

**At the show, the SUBTROPICALS Café would like to decorate the tables with hibiscus blooms so, if you will have some then (even a couple), please ring (09) 376-6874 now to let us know availability.**

# BOOK REVIEW

## **THE LOOKING GLASS GARDEN: Plants and Gardens of the Southern Hemisphere by Peter Thompson.**

**Reviewed by Nick Miller**

This fascinating book is written from the perspective of a northern hemisphere horticultural scientist and gardener. The author was head of the Physiology Department at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, for many years. He has also been a nursery proprietor and a director of The Garden School. Basically he is looking at the fascinating strangeness (to northern hemisphere eyes) of the plants of Southern Africa, Australia, New Zealand and South America (particularly Chile).

He finds that, although the plants from these various lands are strikingly different from country to country, they complement each other remarkably well and may be used to make many fine garden pictures. New Zealand, together with its plants and gardens, features prominently.

Illustrated with many excellent colour photographs of - individual plants, their natural settings and also gardens - the book fills a niche that has been little attempted in recent years. Perhaps *Shrubs for the Milder Counties*, written by W. Arnold-Forster and published in 1948, is the closest approach that I can think of, but almost six decades have gone by since that volume was published and many new discoveries have been made.

A couple of introductory chapters on southern hemisphere plants and their habitats are followed by Part I, Gardens in Sunshine, which contains six chapters looking at different plant types. Chapter titles such as 'Oases with Trees', 'Shrubs for Sunlit Spaces' and 'Plants with Attitude' give some idea of the approach that the author has taken. This section is followed by Part II, 'Gardens in Shadow', with four chapters (including 'Tropical Drama').

Part III deals with gardens in containers ('Plants for the Patio', 'Gardens under Glass') and Part IV looks at case studies of southern hemisphere plants being used in the northern hemisphere. This is followed by a list of Hardiness Zones for a very wide range of plant species, and maps of the various southern hemisphere countries.

As already mentioned, this book is essentially written for northern hemisphere gardeners who would like to try a touch of the exotic south, but this is no reason for local enthusiasts to spurn it. There are many

ideas and plant combinations that we can try and countless new species to search out and grow. Gardeners from more southern or inland areas will find it extremely useful. Many of the photographs are taken in New Zealand, some in gardens that readers will recognise. If you have no other reason to read it, it will open your eyes to the botanical and horticultural marvels of the land in which we are lucky enough to live.

The book is well produced, with no significant errors that were apparent to the reviewer's eyes. You may need to search for it, but it is highly recommended.

*The Looking Glass Garden: Plants and Gardens of the Southern Hemisphere* by Peter Thompson.

Timber Press ISBN 0-88192-499-7 (415 pages)

Available from Touchwood Books - \$89.95

millern@wave.co.nz

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## QUESTION & ANSWER

**What in the subtropical world of plants would grow in coastal Otago? We do have many sheltered areas. D.F.**

This brief note from one of our southern most members was on her renewal form. On further investigation:

Dale Fitzgerald lives on the harbour side of the Otago Peninsula with sea breezes, odd frosts and occasionally a little snow. The constant sea breezes do not present a real shelter problem but what they do is ensure that the occasional frost is gone by about 9am. The same applies to the light snowfalls that are gone by midday, seemingly without damage. As a result Dale has been able to grow a tibouchina in her garden.

Other limitations – being so close to the shore the soil is mostly sand and neither fertile nor moisture retentive. Dale helps both by the use of pea straw, which she uses as a mulch during winter to keep the ground warm, digs it in in spring to improve fertility and moisture retention and then replaces to help cut down on evaporation in summer. The nearby beach provides a good source of seaweed, a very valuable addition to the blood and bone in use.

The quarter acre, east-facing property is on tank water – Dale lost her tibouchina to drought not cold. There was no water to spare for its survival in the driest summer for years. The garden is fully fenced - behind the fence is two-metre high trimmed photinia hedging, underplanted with agapanthus. Existing planting includes two palms that



are twenty-years old and a very large acacia, species unknown. Tender plants are grown in glass and shade houses.

So what is required, is not a subtropical looking garden, but suggestions for the more adaptable (preferably brightly coloured) subtropical plants that will stand summer drought, sharp drainage, low nutrients, coastal breezes, some frost and occasional short-lived snow. In short a recipe for Mediterranean climate plants.

**Bougainvillea** springs to mind – brilliant colour over a long period, stands salt winds, poor soil, full sun (necessary), drought and, if you can establish it over three years, will then stand some frost – a north facing wall would be fine. If you don't want a vine, it can be trained as a tree, shrub or groundcover.

**Buddleja davidii** is a noxious weed in the north but is hardy down to minus 9°C, stands drought and comes in a range of bright colours.

**Caesalpinia gilliesii** is usually deciduous, fast growing, tough with filmy foliage. Hardy to minus 9°C, it flowers all summer in the heat. The blossom is a clump of yellow pea flowers with long red stamens.

**Ceanothus species** are intense blue evergreen shrubs from California. Need full sun and good drainage, are hardy and grow well on the coast.

**Echium fastuosum** is an evergreen shrubby perennial from Madeira with bold blue flower spikes. It is a rapid grower even in these conditions.

**Nerium oleander** is worth trying but may have difficulty if it becomes extremely dry as it usually grows in dry riverbeds with access to water. Hardy to minus 7°C.

**Euryops pectinata** is an evergreen shrubby perennial with bright yellow daisy flowers that (in the north) are present all year. Pruned in November each year to prevent legginess, it will be in flower again by March/April.

South African evergreen aloes flower between autumn and spring and summer dormant bulbs and perennials stand these conditions, adding colour in the cooler months.

These are only a few suggestions and members might like to add to the list with plants that they think might succeed in these conditions. Remember the tibouchina.

**The Palm & Cycad Society of New Zealand**  
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and a quarterly magazine.

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# THE GREAT PRETENDERS

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

***Mahonia lomariifolia***  
**Jonathan Voysey**

**Chinese Holly Grape**  
**Fern-leaf Mahonia**

Beautiful leaf form and a clumping habit of strongly upright, cane-like stems of varying heights give this frost hardy, evergreen shrub an exotic, subtropical appearance. The pinnate, leathery leaves have sharply pointed spines that can inflict some pain. If strategically placed, this is a great plant to deter intruders. The leaves break down slowly (with the spines intact), making a ground cover that seems to repel both cats and dogs.

*M. lomariifolia* comes from Myanmar (Burma) and western China with a climate range that stretches from Zone 7 (-17.7°C) to Zone 10 – a very adaptable plant that is wind resistant. However, it does need some water in summer, as it will not survive arid conditions. Individual stems can reach three metres and the clump can be rejuvenated by cutting selected stems back to the ground.

Young leaves can be copper-coloured giving colour when the plant is not in flower. The upright spikes of yellow flowers arrive in autumn through early winter in Auckland (later further south) and are followed by oval grey-green berries that ripen to blue-black and are attractive to birds.

***Hibiscus mutabilis* ‘Plenus’**

**Confederate Rose**  
**Cotton Rose**

A native of China, this deciduous spreading shrub to three metres (tree-like in warmer areas) is frost hardy - Zones 8 (-12°C) & 9). In colder gardens it behaves more like a perennial, growing flowering branches from a woody base or short trunk.

The leaves are attractive – maple shaped and deep green. The flowers, from late summer to autumn, open white before turning pink and then closing a deep rose to red. The combination of blooms at all colour stages is very effective and lush. The species has single flowers but the cultivar ‘Plenus’ (illustrated opposite) has double flowers up to 10cm across.

Like many other members of this genus, *H. mutabilis* needs full sun, fertile soil and plenty of water in summer, as it is drought tender. Prune hard in winter to remove the dead flowers and seed capsules and to encourage new growth. The flowers are produced in profusion on the new wood.





**...and now for something much more tender!**

**Edith McMillan**

***Aphelandra squarrosa***  
**(possibly var. *louisae*)**

**Zebra Plant**  
**Saffron Spike**

Because this plant is such a staple of the houseplant industry, many gardeners do not realise that this is a worthwhile plant for the garden, especially for its striking foliage.

The flower heads are even more interesting. Like many members of the *Acanthus* family (*justicia*, *odontonema*, *pachystachys*, *sanchezia* and some *ruellias*), *aphelandras* have short-lasting flowers emerging from showy bracts. In *Aphelandra squarrosa*, the flowers are a bright yellow from bracts that are an even deeper yellow. The geometric form of the bracts, rather like a pyramid, is most unusual. The bracts stay in colour for a considerable time - two to three months - changing slowly from bright gold to lime green.

Many books state that this plant is a shy flowerer - presumably indoors - but in the right conditions in the garden it flowers twice a year (at least in Remuera). The main flowering time is autumn and is followed by another one in spring - a great return for little effort.

As usual, the minimum temperature suggestions are based on glasshouse conditions (as much as 13°C minimum - Readers Digest Plant Dictionary). Described as tropical (Graf), Zones 10, 11 (Albrecht Llamas) and Zones 11, 12 (Botanica) nevertheless, *A. squarrosa* will grow well in our conditions providing it has well-drained, fertile soil, is frost free and protected from cool winds. Full or part sun and moisture all year (not wet but not allowed to dry out) will result in rapid growth to its usual maximum height of one metre.

Because the available plants have been raised for indoor use, they have been over-fed, over-heated and subsequently are very tender. It is better to buy smaller plants than larger and to introduce them into the garden in early summer when temperatures are higher and more stable.

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**Top:**

***Aphelandra squarrosa* about 75cm high, photographed growing in a Remuera garden in mid winter.**

**Photo: Noel Roydhouse**

**Bottom:**

***Pavonia xgledhillii* in Freemans Bay in very early winter (late May).**

Originating in tropical America, *A. squarrosa* is not a long-lasting shrub (or probably sub-shrub). Albrecht Llamas suggests that... 'some species commonly grown by nurseries have generally reached their prime at the time of sale and fail to thrive outdoors'.

When buying this plant it is better to select the greener forms. Because so many of the cultivars developed from this species accentuate the white in the leaves, chlorophyll levels are low and consequently the plants lack vigour. Outdoors, shade would be required and even then success is doubtful.

## ***Pavonia x gledhillii* 'Rosea'**

### **Shooting Stars**

This unusual evergreen member of the Hibiscus family (Malvaceae), is a garden hybrid between the Brazilian species, *Pavonia makoyana* and *P. multiflora*. It has been wrongly sold in the past as *P. multiflora* and was also known as *Triplochlamys multiflora*.

The plant in the photograph was bought (glasshouse grown) from Bill van Dyk in New Plymouth in July 2002. The following summer I potted it up and put it out on the north-west-facing terrace under the eaves. Here it was protected from most wind and the strongest sun, but was also on the dry side so it has to be watered all year round – just soaks it up. The heavy, consistent rain that we received this February blew in from the west and drenched all the plants against the wall. The result? The leaves doubled in size and became quite lush.

Like the aphelandra, the pavonia seems to flower here in both spring and autumn. The first autumn flowering was a little late. The flowers did not drop off but stayed, half-open, the entire winter (minimum 3°C thrice but no frost) looking as if a hot water bottle would be nice. When spring finally warmed up, they responded by opening and colouring up more. Such spunk!

A rather leggy plant I duly pinched it out, but obviously not often enough. A small topiary, the stem is 20cm with two 30cm branches, topped with about a dozen flowers which, together with the lush leaves, resembles a bouquet in the photograph.

As I write in early June, one solitary flower is left but on looking more closely, I find new flower buds forming. Do I have the strength of mind to ruthlessly remove them in the interests of a many-headed plant or do I cowardly leave them? Decisions, decisions – which reminds me, I must water it again.

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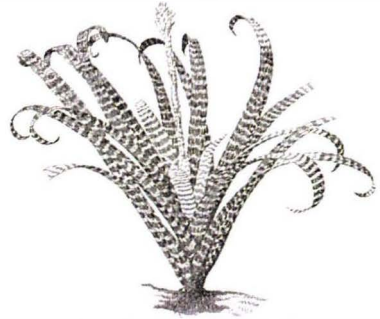
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## LOOKING UP, HANGING DOWN (2)

### HOYAS

#### Heather Greaves

When you tell people that you are growing hoyas, someone is sure to say "My Gran had a hoya in the kitchen. She called it a waxplant and it was huge and it was always in flower and it dripped honeydew all over and it had a beautiful perfume". This hoya that most people know about is *Hoya carnosa*, a species grown mostly inside as a potplant or in very protected positions. It is a surprise to most people that there are about two hundred or more different species and many cultivars. I have managed to collect about eighty different named varieties.

Hoyas previously belonged to the Milkweed family (Asclepiadaceae) but now are a subgroup of the oleander family (Apocynaceae). They come from China, Southeast Asia, India, Thailand, Borneo, Indonesia, New Guinea, the Philippines, the Pacific Islands and Australia. This area contains a wide variety of climatic conditions and hoyas are found in the hot, dry areas, the steamy jungles and also the cool coastal and mountain areas. Consequently, the hoyas that grow in these areas grow in different ways. Some are succulent, some are vines, some like to hang and some are shrubs. Some start out growing in the ground, then climb up the trees and become epiphytic.

The leaves vary in size from 1cm to up to 40 cm or more. They can be smooth and shiny or thick and hairy. The flowers are all shaped like five-pointed stars and are very beautiful, but there the similarity ends. They grow in umbels, with many flowers in each umbel, but the size and colour differ markedly. They can range from pure white through yellow, green, purple, red and brown. Some flowers are so dark they look almost black.

### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**Members are invited to write in about any problems they have with identification, health, where to place specific plants etc. as well as queries and comments 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  
Phone/fax (09) 376-6874  
Email [marlowe@subtropicals.co.nz](mailto:marlowe@subtropicals.co.nz)**

Most hoyas have a perfume, which ranges from delicate to overpowering (depending on your taste and whether the plant is in an enclosed area!).

Some hoyas continue to flower each year from the same peduncle, so don't cut these once the flowering is finished. So far, most of the flowers on my hoyas have appeared from spring to autumn but I have only been growing them for about three years and some of my newer ones have not flowered yet. I am interested in keeping a record of 'what-happens-when', as I have not been able to find any New Zealand information about this.

Most hoyas are relatively easy to grow. Those that come from the cooler and mountainous areas are quite suited to growing outside from Auckland north, with just a little bit of care if you want your plant to look good. They like bright light but look better if they are sheltered from direct sunlight. They will survive the sun and some wind but will look a bit burnt and battered. Suitable sites are amongst other plants to filter the sun, in trees, against the water tank, on the carport trellis, or in baskets under trees - where your hoya will get plenty of light to help with flowering. They need a well drained soil and don't mind a restricted root area - some people leave them in their pots when planting them outside. They need lots of watering in the summer and, apart from those with very small or soft leaves, very little watering in the winter. I give my hoyas a feed of dolomite about August and some liquid fertiliser during the summer.

The main pests are aphids, mealy bugs, spider mites and scale. These can be controlled by using systemic insecticides, spraying with water and inspecting your plants so you can treat the problem before it gets out of hand. Mealy bugs can get down in the soil and your hoya will just die unless you get rid of them!

There are few books to learn about conditions for growing different hoyas in New Zealand, particularly about growing them outside. There are internet sites, but often these present conflicting views about the conditions needed. As with other plant groups, there are many hoyas with suspect names, people having named plants with little care about accuracy.

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**Top;**

***Hoya carnosa* 'Jungle Gardens'**

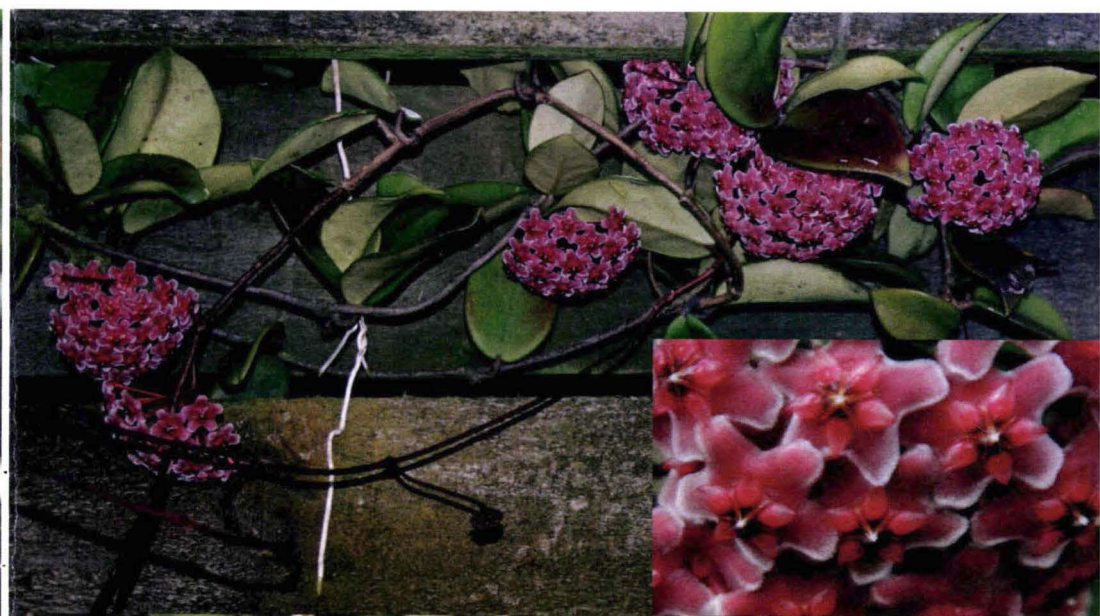
**Inset:**

**Close-up of inflorescence**

**Bottom:**

***Hoya carnosa***

**Inset: *Hoya pauciflora***





## LOOKING UP, HANGING DOWN (3)

### PENDULOUS BROMELIADS

Marjorie Lowe

While the majority of bromeliads have either upright flower spikes or flowers deep in the central cup, some have inflorescences that hang down gracefully. Leaves can be more interestingly marked on the undersides and their beauty can be lost when they are placed too low down.

Growing epiphytically enables one to enjoy these plants at their best. If you do not have suitable trees, hanging baskets or ponga slabs give excellent results with the added advantage that they can be moved around if necessary. The one thing to avoid is hanging them from treated timber (painted or unpainted) where poisonous drips will damage or even kill the plants.

*Aechmea* species with pendent inflorescences include the Brazilian *Ae. warasii* (pictured) that has deep red, mostly erect leaves from the centre of which hangs a string of bright red fat berries with dark violet-blue flower petals. *Ae. racinae* (Brazil, semi-shade) is a small plant with apple-green leaves and red berries that have bright yellow flowers. It is often called 'Christmas Jewels' as it flowers in the cooler months – mine is in flower now. The dozen or so bright red berries last for months. The leaves of *Ae. victoria* var. *discolor* are maroon underneath and the string of long-lasting red berries is about 15-20cm long.

Probably one of the best known cultivars is *Ae.* 'Foster's Favorite'. A cross between *Ae. victoriana* var. *discolor* and *Ae. racinae*, it has maroon leaves that in good light can be dark green on top. The flower spike leans outwards, then down with the weight of the berries. The plant is fairly

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#### Clockwise from top left:

***Vriesea guttata* – spotted leaves complement a long, heavy inflorescence in dusky pink with yellow flowers.**

***Billbergia vittata* – an unnamed cultivar is starting to spread along a plum tree branch, relishing the winter sun.**

***Billbergia rosea* – the inflorescence photographed in January at Nestlebrae is already touching the ground.**

***Tillandsia stricta* – like many tillandsias this plant when in clumps sends flowering stems up, out and down.**

***Aechmea warasii* – big, fat, red berries are a long-lasting feature of this bromeliad with wine leaves.**

**Photos: Marjorie Lowe**

stoloniferous – mine is climbing up faster than the tree fern to which it is attached. As aechmea berries age they tend to dull but a shower of rain returns them to their former shiny brightness.

Billbergias are usually maligned for the briefness of their flowering period although many accepted garden plants last no longer. With many very usefully flowering between autumn and spring, they really come into their own when grown high. What they lack in individual flowering length is made up by the sheer quantity of flowers over a reasonable period when the plants are left to naturalise. Andrew Steens (Exotica) attached some to a *Phoenix canariensis* in Tauranga and left them to it. They ended up completely encircling the palm and producing hundreds of flower stems.

Because so many billbergias have pendent stems, it is worthwhile to select those that have good foliage markings on the underside and still look handsome when out of flower.

The genus *Tillandsia* contains the most pendulous of all bromeliads – *T. usneoides*, otherwise known as Spanish Moss, will hang down from anything. Rootless, it grows rapidly if happy, forming long strands and building up into dense skeins. Bromeliads and orchids grow well together in many habitats, tropical companion plants. Draping Spanish Moss over the roots of newly attached orchid epiphytes helps them root onto the host plant more easily.

Other tillandsias such as *T. aeranthos* and *T. stricta* clump up and send their flowering stems up, down and sideways. Because of this and their fairly small size they are better sited closer to eye-level.

*Ursulaea macvaughii* is one of two species described as recently as 1994. Despite this it has been available, although not easily, in New Zealand for several years. A large plant with a big tank it would probably be best planted on the top of a wall to allow the bold scape (five years to flowering) to be seen.

There are not many pendent vrieseas but one is particularly handsome. *Vriesea guttata* from southern Brazil, is a small epiphyte that grows in colonies in open forests with fairly dry conditions at high elevations. The inflorescence shown is nearly three times the height of the plant, the result of occasional feeding.

Two very similar vrieseas are *V. simplex* and *V. scalaris* with forms of both being available here. The first is the more striking with a red stem, widely spaced red floral bracts (7-12) tipped yellow and yellow flowers. *V. ospinae* produces many offsets before it flowers in bright yellow but is a little tender needing a warm corner to succeed. And of course the glorious red *Tillandsia dyeriana* – as a super tropical only wishful thinking.

# THE TROPICAL APRICOT

## Russell Fransham

Imagine a richly-flavoured, seedless, brightly coloured, sour-sweet tropical fruit that ripens every day of the year – here in New Zealand.

Impossible you say – no, not at all. This describes the extraordinary ‘Tropical Apricot’ - a seedless hybrid between the Sri-Lankan gooseberry or ‘Kitembilla’ (*Dovyalis hebecarpa*) and its close relative, the Abyssinian ‘Kashun’ (*Dovyalis abyssinica*).

Both these parents are seriously thorny shrubs with seriously sour fruit, but their offspring, a natural hybrid that occurred in Florida in the last few decades and now known as the ‘Tropical Apricot’, is much more friendly to both skin and palate! There are a few spines scattered randomly along some of the branches.

It grows like a weed, two metres a year in good conditions and is wind and frost-hardy...well, in light Northland/Auckland sort of frosts. I’m not sure about the maximum size here, but it reaches about three to four metres high and more across in warmer climates.

Rambunctious, sprawly, it is a big, bushy, multi-stemmed shrub, with glossy deep green foliage and fruit at every stage of development all year long. We can pick a kilo or more every day from our six-year-old specimen. But of course, after a while, I just don’t get around to it and the wax-eyes do the honours. Yet there are times when the ripe fruit are few and far between, but they are always there.

The flavour is intense, sour but rich and reminiscent of apricot and tamarind. The skin is like fine velvet and pulls away easily from the seedless, juicy, red-orange pulp, making it ideal as a fruit cocktail base. The ripe fruit is too soft to ever be available fresh in the markets, but it freezes perfectly. A friend makes the most beautiful brandy from our tropical apricots and keeps our liquor cabinet stocked in return for as many fruit as he can carry away.

### WISHFUL THINKING!

In the summer 2003 issue I wrote – ‘If the author is correct in suggesting zones 9-11 for *Heliconia rostrata*’...

Well she did not – the heliconia that she suggested for that climate zone was *H. bihai*, Lobster Claw Heliconia or Wild Plantain (musoid). A very handsome inflorescence, but growing to five metres tall so ‘no room at the inn’ in my small garden. Sorry.

**Editor**

# PLANT SOURCES for this issue

- Aechmea racinae* – Greens Bromeliads, Maungakaramea  
*Aechmea warasii* – Greens Bromeliads, Maungakaramea, Exotica, Matakana  
*Aechmea* ‘Foster’s Favorite’ – Greens, Exotica  
*Aphelandra squarrosa* – a houseplant in general supply  
*Billbergia rosea* – sometimes named *B. venezuelana* – no source located yet  
*Billbergia vittata* – cultivars & hybrids – most bromeliad specialists  
*Blechnum novae-zelandiae* – Riverview Nurseries, Whenuapai  
*Brugmansias* – Nestlebrae Exotics, Helensville (**show**),  
*Clivia gardenii* – Keith Hammett, Joy Plants, David Brundell – all at the **show**  
*Clivia x cyrtanthiflora* - Ditto  
*Clivia* ‘Winter Glory’ – Keith Hammett – at the **show**  
*Clivia* ‘Woodland Glory’ – Keith Hammett – at the **show**  
*Dendrobium thyrsiflorum* – Tuckers Orchid Nursery, Redvale, Auckland  
*Dracaena draco* – this form is virtually unobtainable  
*Haemanthus albiflos* – Joy Plants, Pukekohe, Wharepuke, Kerikeri  
*Hibiscus mutabilis* – Russell Fransham, Matapouri Bay  
*Hoya* – Trees for Tomorrow, Kaitaia – at the **show**  
*Mahonia lomariifolia* – generally available  
*Pavonia x gledhillii* ‘Rosea’ – Bill van Dyk – at the **show**  
*Schizolobium parahybum* – Wharepuke, Kerikeri, Russell Fransham, Matapouri Bay, Nestlebrae Exotics, Helensville  
*Tibouchina granulosa*, and ‘Rosea’ – Russell Fransham – at the **show**  
*Tibouchina lepidota* ‘Alstonville’ – Russell Fransham, at the **show**  
*Tillandsia stricta* – tillandsia specialists  
Tropical apricot – Russell Fransham - at the **show**  
*Ursulaea macvaughii* – Pottering About, Whakatane – at the **show**  
*Vriesea guttata* – Greens Bromeliads, Maungakaramea  
*Vriesea scalaris* – Greens Bromeliads  
*Vriesea simplex* – Exotica, Matakana, Greens Bromeliads

## THE SUBTROPICAL PLANT SALE

is a great way to meet the growers and specialists who are bringing some (not enough room for them all) of their plants to tempt you into exciting purchases for your garden.

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# BACK COVER STORY

## AN UNUSUAL FORM OF *Dracaena draco*

**Brian Timms**

How desirable anything unusual becomes! As *Dracaena draco* becomes a common garden plant, available at garden centres for next to nothing, attention turns to different forms of it. Actually this is not quite true, as rare unbranched specimens have been objects of speculation and desire among succulent aficionados for quite some time.

As many of you know, the ordinary form grows as a single trunk for a few years, usually to about a couple of metres, and then it flowers. The large and spectacular flower head then becomes pollinated - whether selfed or from nearby others I don't know. Then it produces dozens of fertile berries that the local birds like and scatter hither and yon. You then are pulling them out for months to come (or potting them up, but don't expect to make a fortune). Incidentally, the overseas websites I found all seemed to indicate that the seeds are very difficult to germinate - they certainly are not in Auckland.

Anyway, the flower is terminal and the trunk branches around it next growing season, usually into two or, more commonly, three new heads and the process is eventually repeated, to give a beautiful multi-branched tree, rather mushroom-shaped.

Sometimes this does not happen and the tree may be quite sparsely branched and irregular, like the one outside St Stephens Church in Parnell, or not at all branched, like the in three St. Vincents Avenue, Remuera. These are all at least twenty metres tall, looking for all the world like ludicrously over-sized toilet brushes. They are most spectacular (if rather bizarre), vanishingly rare and no doubt are also extremely valuable.

The one in the photograph on the back cover is in Herne Bay and the only other unbranched *D. draco* that I know of. (It is young enough yet and may flower eventually and thus lose its status).

For such a plant has no means of reproducing unless it turns out to be valuable enough to be tissue cultured and, even then, I doubt whether there would be any guarantee that the clones would not just branch anyway. So if by some chance you should grow a *D. draco* and it turns out not to be a brancher, count your blessings! And don't tell too many people, or else someone will probably steal it.

# *Blechnum novae-zelandiae*

Kiokio

(syn. *Blechnum capense*)

Barbara Parris

*Blechnum novae-zelandiae* (Kiokio) is a recently described species that has long been known erroneously as *B. capense*. The real *Blechnum capense* occurs in southern Africa and *B. novae-zelandiae* is restricted to New Zealand, where it is widespread, ranging from the Kermadec Islands through the North and South Islands to Stewart Island and the Chathams. It is one of the most common ferns in the country and occurs in a wide variety of habitats including forest, scrub, swamp, cliffs, stream banks and roadside banks.

The fronds are once pinnate, with the pinnae oblong to linear. Sterile pinnae are very different from fertile pinnae, the former being green at maturity, while the fertile pinnae are much more slender and are brown when mature. Both types of frond are often brightly coloured when young, in shades of greenish orange through to scarlet. The colour is best developed in bright light. So far, growers have not selected for good colour in young fronds or for size of fronds in mature plants, although the species is variable enough in the wild that good coloured dwarfs or giants could probably be easily developed.

In ideal situations *Blechnum novae-zelandiae* can become very large, with fronds up to three metres long and half a metre wide (although one metre long and one quarter of a metre wide is more common), and the rhizome can branch to produce an imposing crown of fronds. A well-grown clump is very impressive, with fronds arching upwards and outwards. In gardens it prefers well-lit situations and will handle full sun with ease; it can be used to good effect in waterside plantings and in native plant gardens, associated with *Dicksonia squarrosa*, flaxes, native grasses and sedges, arthropodium, coprosma, muehlenbeckia, etc. Light frosts are not a problem. Although often recommended for damp shady places, it will not handle deep shade very well, being slow to grow in these conditions and producing young fronds that are green rather than orange to scarlet.

*Blechnum novae-zelandiae* is an undemanding kind of plant. The old fronds are covered by the new ones, so grooming is not necessary, although some gardeners find the fertile fronds ugly and remove them. This does not harm the plant. A good feed of general garden fertiliser twice a year (August and February), and water in dry spells, suits it fine.

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Beautiful new frond unfurling in bright pink - photographed near  
Lake Tarawera, Rotorua. Photo: Grant Bayley



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