

Auckland Garden

Newsletter of the Auckland Botanic Gardens and Friends

March 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 June 2023 issue
should be submitted by 3 p.m.
Friday 5 May 2023 to the Editor
ross.ferguson@
plantandfood.co.nz

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Images

Front cover: *Eucomis*. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Visiting rātā moehau, *Salvia madrensis* and Friends Artist in Residence, Neal Palmer

Eucomis (front cover)

As I write this it is mid-January and most of the South African pineapple lilies (*Eucomis*) are in full flower. When looking at these easily grown rewarding bulbs they appear much like hyacinths.

They are best in well-drained soil and either full sun or partial shade. The bulbs should be planted half in, or if you prefer half out, of the soil. They are great for naturalising, reappearing and multiplying reliably each year.

There are about 10 species. One of my favourites is *Eucomis zambesiaca*, the smallest available with pure white flowers to about 15 cm in summer. There is also a late flowering form of *E. autumnalis*. By comparison the giant *E. pole-evansii* can grow 2 m tall with soft green, star-like flowers that last for weeks.

The unusual species *E. montana* has large green foliage spotted purple on the reverse. The large white flowers with dark maroon eyes have a most unusual scent.

Most of the species I grow have now hybridised. Hybrids come in white and many shades of green and purple, and some have attractive dark foliage. All make good floral displays. I raised 'Darkest Africa' and 'White Joy', and 'Sparkling Rosy' is another popular cultivar.

All *Eucomis* are easily grown from seed, division and leaf cuttings.

If you are interested in reading further about these rewarding bulbs check out *Bulbs and Perennials* by R.E. Harrison, and

Bulbs for New Zealand gardeners and collectors by Jack Hobbs and Terry Hatch. Both are available for reading in the Friends Reference Library at the Gardens.

Terry Hatch

Eucomis 'Darkest Africa'



Jack's update

Any hopes we had for a relatively quiet start to the year were quickly dashed. In mid-January we had the first full evacuation in all my years working at the Gardens when a knife-wielding man assaulted a young woman in the Puhinui Forest Trail area adjoining Tōtara Park.

Despite scant initial information, the Gardens staff responded magnificently, ensuring a very efficient evacuation. For almost two-and-half hours staff remained in two bubbles until given the “all clear” by police. I received praise about the staff response from several police involved in the operation.

Then of course in late January the floods hit. Fortunately the Gardens proved to be very resilient, although we did have water damage inside our Visitor Centre and our stream banks were scoured of much of their vegetation. The Domain sports fields became a well-publicised lake and four trees were felled but otherwise the damage was relatively minor compared to what many went through.

On a much more positive note, the NZ Gardens Trust (NZGT) reconfirmed the 5-star rating for Auckland Botanic Gardens. NZGT is an umbrella body for 112 public and private gardens throughout the country that provides assessments of garden quality that are used by garden visitors seeking expert objective appraisal of the overall quality of gardens prior to visiting. To get everything ready our field team worked extremely hard late last year during what is always a busy time anyway.

On 16 December we bade farewell to Tony Carson who gave 43 years of service to the Gardens. An indication of the affection everyone has for Tony was evidenced by the number of former staff who came along to bid him a fond farewell. Several others who could not be there sent messages. Tony has indicated he may come back as a volunteer sometime in the future, it will always be good to see him.

A new mobility scooter has been given to us by an anonymous donor. This very generous donation has completed our fleet of three scooters which will be much appreciated by visitors.

Later in this newsletter Mere Brewer writes about salvias. *Salvia argentea* was planted by our innovative Pippa Lucas in the bedding displays along the Pōhutukawa Walkway, and they have been a real talking point with visitors this summer.

It was wonderful to get together with staff and volunteers late last year to recognize all the great mahi that took place, and to enjoy each other's company. The Gardens would not be the great destination they have become without the support of our Friends and volunteers, and it is good to recognize this and celebrate our success.

When visiting the Gardens with relatives on Boxing Day the plant that caught everyone's eye was *Pleroma mutabile* (syn. *Melastoma mutabile*) at the back of our Rock Garden. It is rather large so not suitable for small gardens, but at that time

of year it is truly spectacular.

In the Brazilian Atlantic forest where it grows wild it can reach 12 m in height, but it can be kept bushy and manageable with annual pruning after flowering. The flowers open white before turning pink then deepening to a bright rose-purple shade, so at any time flowers in three distinctly different colours are present.

Every time I see this spectacular plant in full flower I remember Bert Blumhardt who first donated it to the Gardens. Bert was a senior manager in the Parks Department with a genial disposition and a keen interest in plants. He had a particular interest in unusual pōhutukawa and collected seed from specimens he came across with flowers in unusual colours including pastel shades, apricot,

yellow and other unusual hues. Much of this seed was sown in the Gardens nursery, and today the resultant trees are a feature of several regional parks including Shakespeare, Long Bay and Āwhitu.

When I stroll through my garden many of the plants bring back memories of the people and places I got them from, prompting very fond memories of the many wonderful people I have been privileged to know and share plants with such as Terry Hatch, Graeme Platt, Bev McConnell, Fiona McDonald and Dr Keith Hammett.

Perhaps this nostalgia is a sign of my advancing years so I will sign off wishing you all an enjoyable and peaceful rest of the year, and a reminder to always make time to smell the roses.

Jack Hobbs

Tony Carson's farewell. From left: Mere Brewer, Jack Hobbs, Alan Finlayson, Shane Everett, Brian Jones, Roger Price, Tony Carson and Alan Matthews



Volunteering in 2023

Volunteering is a great way to stay active, connect with other people and make a positive contribution to the wonderful environment here at the Botanic Gardens.

We have a thriving group of around 100 passionate volunteers who work in a variety of different roles. Whether it is helping out in the garden collections and Nursery or the Growing Friends plant sales, through driving or guiding on the Wiri Rambler or staffing the Library we have a range of volunteer roles.

We don't always have immediate vacancies in all areas so we have an "expression of interest process" where you can register your interest and we can then contact you when a suitable opportunity arises.

As we head into 2023 we do have some vacancies in the following areas:

Wiri Rambler Crew

We are planning a day when people can come, ride on the Rambler, find out what

is involved and meet members of our friendly team. If interested contact Kate Moodie, ph. 09 297 7234 or Paul Swift at the Botanic Gardens, ph. 09 267 1457.

Revegetation Rovers

A new fortnightly drop-in roving group (probably meeting on Thursdays but we are testing availability of members) with a focus on weed control in the forest fragments on site as well as along the Puhinui Stream and other revegetation areas in the Gardens. Ideal for those who can't commit to attending every week.

Domain Wintergardens

We are currently exploring volunteer opportunities at the Wintergardens so watch this space for more details over the next few months as we confirm plans.

Contact Paul Swift, paul.swift@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz, to learn more about current volunteer vacancies.

Paul Swift

Horticultural happenings

After a busy 2022, the Horticultural Team returned to work after a well-earned break and hit the ground running for 2023.

Over the festive season, we have all been reflecting on what we achieved over the past year, with new staff coming on board and a long-serving team member (Tony Carson) retiring. On the back of

two COVID-impacted years, 2022 was a year for catching up in the field. A New Zealand Gardens Trust (NZGT) assessment late last year put a lot of pressure on staff but they responded well.

Thankfully, all the hard work that the wider field team invested has paid off with the Botanic Gardens retaining their

5-star status. This will set us in good stead moving forward, particularly with the new presentation standards which we have been working on and which will be going live in the coming months.

Through the summer months, the team has benefited from the help from our two summer students, Holly Cameron and Janelle Evans. As they do every year, the summer students help give us a huge lift in the field, at a time of year when many of the staff are taking leave and they help to keep the place humming during a time when we get numerous visitors. We wish

Holly and Janelle well as they return to their respective university studies.

Next month we also farewell one of our apprentices, Andrew Currey. Andrew has progressed tremendously over his three years with us and made a great contribution to the team. We wish him well for the future as he embarks on the next chapter in his career.

We are looking forward to having two new staff members join the team shortly. News on this in the next newsletter.

Shaun Rice

Taking a closer look at

A summer of fun at the Gardens

2022 was a rather strange year with COVID-19 and lockdowns having a huge impact on the level of engagement that was on offer at the Gardens. Popular activities such as Drop and Learns were stopped, volunteering activity was intermittent and large events such as Eye on Nature were delivered on-line rather than on site. Having been locked-down for so much of 2021 and 2022 the importance of connecting with the natural world for our health and wellbeing has been well documented and recognised. With this in mind, the programme of events for Summer 2023 was devised to provide plenty of opportunities for families to connect directly with the natural environment here at the Gardens.

The theme of "Taking a closer look at..." was devised to encourage families to

get out and about in the Gardens taking a closer look at familiar Garden features. A Discovery Waka trolley was built by some of our volunteers and it was packed with magnifying glasses, books and other educational goodies. This theme of "Taking a closer look at" was also chosen because it aligned well with this summer's Friends Artist in Residence, Neal Palmer, as many of his works feature close-ups of botanical subjects.

Working alongside Neal and his current exhibition in the Visitor Centre gallery two public workshops were delivered. The first workshop, for children, took place on Tuesday 10 January and owing to very wet weather it was delivered inside the classroom in the Potter Children's Garden rather than outdoors as originally intended. Neal had gathered a wide range of natural materials ideal for textural rubbings and also set up various tables

where the children (and accompanying adults) could try out new painting techniques such as “dry brushing”.

Despite the wet weather we had a good crowd of participants, and their level of engagement and commitment was fantastic. It is unusual for people to stay for 2 hours at a “drop-in session” such as this but that was certainly the case here and Neal did an excellent job planning and delivering this workshop.

The second workshop, for adults, proved incredibly popular too. It was limited to 12 places and as soon as the details were released the event was fully booked within 24 hours and once again it was a fantastic day. Having Neal regularly working in the Visitor Centre, resplendent in his bright yellow Artist in Residence T-shirt, has been a great experience for the visitors who have been able to talk to him as well as enjoy his amazing artworks.

Some other highlights of the summer included a guest storyteller from southern England who was visiting New Zealand and was keen to share some stories from his home with our visitors. Complete with Northumbrian bagpipes, Mike O’Leary enthralled the audience with ancient tales and wonderful tunes on one of the few hot and sunny days that we had this year.

Once again the audience stayed for the full two hours and after a karakia to close by one of the visitors they were left buzzing. Mike’s story telling session supported our weekly partnership with Manurewa Library who have been visiting each Friday morning in January to deliver a storytime book-reading session with a botanical theme. We were also delighted to host the Library’s Wriggle and Rhyme

music and dance sessions for our very young visitors. These sessions are a great way to introduce our youngest visitors to the Gardens and we hope that they will become lifelong visitors in the future. Again working in partnership with Manurewa Library, some new Book Baskets – complete with picnic blankets and books from the Manurewa Library – were fitted in some of the shelters in the Edible and Threatened Native Gardens so that families could take a moment to sit, read and relax in our wonderful garden environments.

We also had visiting artist Toni Mosley come in every Wednesday morning to run some hands-on craft activities and the Discovery Waka was out again as we also delivered a nature-based loose parts play morning where the children were able to create art inspired by leaves, seeds and pods as well as use their imagination to invent games and just take the time to explore and connect with the wonderful natural materials that can be found in the Gardens.

We ended January with a “Sniffari” senses activity where visitors could create their own little blend of herbs and leaves based on their favourite smells. Once again the weather impacted on this session as Auckland endured a day of constant and record-breaking rainfall and subsequent flooding so we set up the activity in the Visitor Centre rather than out and about exploring the gardens as intended.

Although the weather was unpredictable this summer, we hope that our visitors were still able to join in with some of the fun that we provided and let’s hope that 2023 is a little bit more settled!

Paul Swift

From the President

Hi, Everyone,

I hope that those of you who have been affected by the recent storms are coping OK.

The Committee has been very busy over the last three months. In January we launched the monthly news-sheet "Just Between Friends". If you didn't receive it by e-mail in mid-January, please confirm your e-mail address with our Administrator, Irene Horton, at friendsofabg@gmail.com. We know that a number of Friends didn't receive it, either because their e-mails bounced back or we didn't have e-mail addresses in the first place.

The next issue will come out mid-February. For those without e-mail, copies will be available at the Visitor Centre desk.

Thank you to the members who took the time to send positive feedback about the news-sheet.

By the time you read this, we will have held our first monthly "Get-Together": a light luncheon then a presentation by Dr Ross Ferguson, on "Plants that Changed History". Thanks Ross, for so readily accepting the request to do this for us.

The next event planned is a visit to the amazing garden of Friends member, Kathrina Muller. I haven't had the pleasure of seeing it yet, but I am told that every inch of her property that is possible has been planted up. Kathrina is a very interesting lady, being involved in herbs, tree crops and seed-savers groups, as

well as volunteering at the ABG. We will meet at the Library on Thursday 2 March around 1.00 p.m. for afternoon tea before making our way to Kathrina's place, which is not far from the ABG.

Paul Swift, the Volunteer Co-ordinator, has arranged a get-together for Friends and Volunteers on Wednesday 12 April between 9.30 and 11.30 a.m. in the Friends Building. The topic will be "The Creation of the Mānuka Garden". See details later in the newsletter.

The visit to the Herbarium at the Museum and the Domain which we had planned for 1 April clashed with a major music event to be held there, so the date has been changed to Monday 1 May. See more information about this trip from Cleone Campbell, elsewhere in this newsletter.

The Friends organisation turns 40 on 25 February 2023! To celebrate the work that has been done by many over the years to build the Society to where it is today, we will hold an evening of celebration and reminiscence on Thursday 23 March in the Visitor Centre from 4.30 p.m. We can chat and listen to talks about some of our history over a glass of wine and some finger food.

Everyone is welcome - members, partners, volunteers, staff and their partners. Please register your interest with Irene at friendsofabg@gmail.com. Please put "40th Birthday" in the subject line.

We are pleased to welcome Cr Christine Fletcher to the Board of Trustees.

The FABG Photographic Competition entries will be displayed in the Visitor Centre until 5 March.

Our Visiting Artist, Neal Palmer, has proved to be a hit, with adults and children alike. Thanks, Neal, for providing such a wonderful opportunity for people to try out their artistic skills.

We have received a further payment from the Estate of Neville Edgeworth. His bequest to the Friends totals \$352,000. Some of the funds were used, along with those from other benefactors, to purchase

the Llew Summers sculpture, *To the End of Love*, in the Rose Garden.

One of the Friends main aims is to help fund members of the ABG and the Domain staff to further their education. \$15,000 has been approved by the Committee for 8 members to attend three various upcoming conferences.

The 2023 Buchanan Award recipient will be selected in February.

Thank you.

Viv Canham

Introducing Deidre Barry

Deidre Barry is the most recent addition to Friends Executive Committee.

"I first became involved at the Botanic Gardens when a neighbour (ABG volunteer) found that they needed some admin help with Sculpture in the Gardens (SitG). She happened to be walking at the Gardens and she asked if I were interested. I found myself working for Kim Stretton behind the scenes. From there I helped with school holiday activities as this worked in timewise with my volunteering at a local school. At the next SitG I volunteered behind the scenes and Liz Powell approached me regarding becoming a committee member. Two years later her persistence worked, so here I am.

I love beautiful gardens, bush walks, etc, but usually identify plants by the colour of the flower (pink flower) or size of the

tree (very large tree) so am not sure what skills I can bring to the committee. My plant knowledge is definitely improving and hopefully I will find my niche."

Deidre Barry and friend.



Art Group news

I hope everyone has had a good break over the summer and despite the awful rain, managed to get out into their gardens or to the beach. We managed a few days in Tairua with beautiful weather which was lovely and relaxing.

This year, the art group was off to a bumper start with artists coming to demonstrate at both our January and February meetings. New Zealand botanical artist, Jenny Haslimeier came to our January meeting - many of you may remember Jenny as she was a regular member of the group until she moved to Edinburgh a few years ago. Jenny is over in New Zealand for the summer visiting family, and we are delighted that she agreed to come to our January meeting, to show us her work and demonstrate how to get more depth into our work without overdoing it.

February saw Neal Palmer, this year's Artist in Residence, giving us an insight into his large-scale works. If you haven't already been to see him in action in the Visitor Centre gallery, I urge you to do so.

Botanical Art Exhibition 2023 – “Hidden Secrets” – 8 April – 28 May

We now have a theme and name for our annual exhibition. It will be called “Hidden Secrets” and through it we hope to address the problem of “Plant Blindness”, a term coined twenty years ago by two American botanists James Wandersee and Elisabeth Schussler. Put simply, it is the lack of awareness and appreciation of plants in one's own environment – yes, I know I'm talking to the converted here!

Through our artworks, we will be encouraging visitors to look at and understand how the plants around us are integral to our survival. Edible, medicinal plants, or those generally overlooked, and less showy plants will be among those depicted with their inner workings – their “hidden secrets” on show. With information alongside explaining the plant's significance in our world, I hope this exhibition will encourage the younger generation to take an interest in plants. Unfortunately, the New Zealand school curriculum has very little botany in it which only compounds the problem.

Here is a link to a video on YouTube – the work of Benedict Furness, an Honours Biology student at Bath Spa University in the United Kingdom explaining plant blindness in an entertainingly informative way. <https://youtu.be/SuTkgcFjOWw>

Bryan Poole (1953–2022)

I heard that just before Christmas, New Zealand botanical artist, Bryan Poole died. Foremost a printmaker, Poole was known for his large, detailed, hand-coloured etchings of plants and nature. He had a great eye for composition, giving traditional etched botanical art a very contemporary feel.

Born in New Zealand, Poole moved to the United Kingdom in the early 1980s, from there he carved out a career in printmaking and botanical illustration. With no prior art training (he graduated in politics and economics from the University of Otago) he took a few ink drawings to Kew

Gardens where he subsequently trained and worked from 1980–1986 under the guidance of Dr Christopher Grey-Wilson, former editor of *The Kew Magazine*.

Commissions from prestigious botanical institutions including Worldwide Fund for Nature, the Natural History Museum in London, the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. among others followed, with his aquatint etchings becoming very sought-after at the yearly Chelsea Flower Shows. Following his promotion from Associate Member to Fellow of the Royal Society of Painter-Printmakers in 2006, Poole received a prestigious Gold Medal from the Royal Horticultural Society in 2007.

You may remember his work in the Botanical Art Worldwide exhibition held here at the gardens in 2018. We were extremely honoured and delighted to receive an entry from such a renowned botanical artist.

Interestingly the artwork Poole chose for the Botanic Art Worldwide exhibition was not an etching but an artwork using egg tempera on vellum, another very old, traditional way of working.

Prior to convenient paints in tubes, artists made their own paints, grinding pigments and mixing them with egg yolks. Yes, the artwork would smell but,

I'm told, after a while the smell goes away! Vellum, his choice of substrate was calf skin which he probably got from William Cowley's – the last traditional maker of vellum in the United Kingdom. I had the pleasure of visiting and personally buying some vellum back in 2016 for my entry in the Botanical Art Worldwide exhibition. I love seeing botanical artists embracing many of the older traditional techniques for their work.

In a phone conversation, I asked Poole why a painting, not an etching, to which he replied that the acids and inks used in the process of creating an etching caused havoc with his hands and that he had stopped etching a while ago.

If you are interested in knowing more about Bryan Poole and his work, have a look at his, unfortunately out-of-date website - <http://www.etchart.co.uk/> or read a very comprehensive article by Katherine Tyrrell at <https://www.botanicalartandartists.com/news/bryan-poole-1953-2022>

As always, if you are wanting to know more about our friendly group, please get in touch with me on 021 1617070 or email me at lesley.alexander.smith@gmail.com. We meet once a month on the last Saturday, from 9.30 to 12.30ish – we'd love to see you there!

Lesley Alexander

Members' email addresses

The Friends of the Botanic Gardens Executive Committee has set up a monthly emailed news-sheet for Friends members, "Just Between Friends", to keep members up to date with Friends and Gardens events and activities. The first issue went out to members on 13 January 2023.

If you did not receive this it is either because we don't have an email address for you or the one we have is incorrect.

To keep our records up-to-date and to ensure that you get information about upcoming events please send your email address (and name) to our administrator, Irene Horton, at friendsofabg@gmail.com. Please be assured your address will be used solely for the news-sheet or notices about Friends or Gardens activities.

If you did receive the January edition of "Just Between Friends" there is no need to respond as we have your details correct.

Volunteer Famil

The topic will be the creation of the new Mānuka Garden – design and concept with Jeff Jones and then a session with Jeff and Pippa Lucas talking about the Native Plant Ideas Garden and the Collection Curator rotation which has resulted in Pippa taking over these areas from Jeff and her plans for the future.

Some of our amazing volunteers!

Wednesday 12 April

9.30 a.m. and 11.30 a.m.

Friends Building

- 9.30 to 10.30 with Jeff and Pippa
- 10.30 to 11.30 morning tea and update/chat.

RSVP to Botanic.Gardens@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz



Friends trip to Auckland Domain

An opportunity to view the fascinating collection held by the Auckland War Memorial Museum Herbarium and the iconic Auckland Domain Gardens.

Programme:

- Visit to the Herbarium with the staff.
- Visit to the Auckland Domain Gardens, guided by the Garden staff.
- Lunch.

Bring your lunch and drinks if you wish to have a picnic, or you may wish to patronise the cafes.

When/Where:

Meet at the Museum, 9.20 a.m. at the Museum South Atrium entrance, Monday 1 May 2023.

Transport options:

a) Independent. Park either in the Domain parking or the Museum Carpark, entry from Maunsell Road side of the Museum, then meet at the Museum South Atrium entrance at 9.20 a.m.

OR

b) Van from Botanic Gardens. Jack Hobbs has kindly made available an ABG van as transport there and back for nine passengers.

OR

c) Carpool from Botanic Gardens. For any additional Friends to those riding in the van, we will carpool from the Gardens.

If leaving from the Botanic Gardens:
Meet: outside the Visitor Centre 8.15 a.m.
Leaving: 8.30 a.m.

Returning: approximately 2.00 p.m.

Cost:

\$5.00. Please pay online to 12-3011-0757619-00 and include your name and "May trip" or pay at the Visitor Centre.

Registration:

Please email friendsofabg@gmail.com and confirm your name and contact phone number. Please also let us know if you want a ride in the ABG van (note there is a passenger limit, so book early to ensure a seat) or if you are willing to carpool and the number of passengers you can take.

Book by:

21 April 2023

For queries:

Email Cleone Campbell campbellcleone@gmail.com or phone or text 021 2128 579

New date!
1st May

Book a spot!

Friends celebration - 40 years

The Friends of the Auckland Botanic Gardens (Inc.) turns 40 on 25 February 2023.

We are celebrating the work that has been done over those years to build the society up to where it is today by holding an evening of celebration and reminiscences. Drinks and finger food will be served.

Please register by Monday 20 March, 2023: Email friendsofabg@gmail.com. Please put "40th birthday" in the subject line and give the number of people attending. If you don't have email, please phone Reception at the Botanic Gardens – ph. 09 267 1457.

When: Thursday 23 March, 2023,
4.30 – 7.30 p.m.

Where: Visitor Centre Huakaiwaka,
Auckland Botanic Gardens

Invited: Friends and partners,
volunteers and partners,
Gardens staff and partners

**Register
now!**

Ayrlies Plant Fair

Ayrlies Plant Fair, 17 and 18 March, 2023, 125 Potts Road, Whitford, Auckland

Garden and wetlands are open 9.00 a.m. – 3.00 p.m. Please purchase tickets (\$15.00) online (www.ayrlies.co.nz), showing

your ticket confirmation on entering the Garden, or pay at the gate. Please bring BYO bags for all the plants you buy. The Growing Friends will have a stall. All visitors and attendees will be required to show a vaccine pass.

Wiri Rambler reminiscences

Neil McCarthy

Last December, at the age of almost 90, Neil McCarthy, the longest serving member of our Wiri Rambler team, retired. Neil joined the Wiri Rambler as a driver in 2003, and about two years later added the weekly maintenance and cleaning to his role. John Yelavich took over this task about eight years ago.

Neil was held in high respect by all the team members not only for his expert knowledge of tractors and all things mechanical but also for his cheerful and helpful way. We feel privileged to have worked with Neil, so many thanks Neil.

I asked Neil to share some of his experiences:

“When I joined the Wiri Rambler team back in 2003 the Friends had just got the new Kubota tractor, to couple up with the carriages which had been made earlier and were originally towed around by a tractor kindly lent by the Botanic Gardens.

At that time its full potential was not understood: it was a very nice thing to drive around the gardens taking passengers on a short circuit trip on a nice sunny day on a casual summer Sunday basis. In those days the Visitor Centre did not exist; there was only the ring road bordered by the then Rose Garden, since moved. The Rambler team was just a few good people.

However, by popular demand because of its unique and attractive looks,

especially with children, families and the elderly, its popularity began to grow, so to develop its potential as an important asset to the Botanic Gardens and, of course, an important fundraiser for the Friends, a roster of drivers and guides was developed.

Each Sunday, weather permitting, during the Summer the Rambler was operational (taking into account the occasional shower). The same system exists today.

I took over the maintenance and certification of the Rambler in 2005 and the bookings for specials, etc. for a while until some welcome help arrived to relieve me of the bookings programme which grew very fast, especially with the retirement homes, elderly, garden clubs, etc.

However, that's not all the Rambler has been used for, its history includes, weddings, funerals including the Pastor's altar, birthdays adult and children, rest home and disabled people, shuttle services for special functions, diplomatic and foreign dignitaries, to name a few, plus the many thousands of happy people trippers. It's a unique photo icon to the Botanic Gardens and South Auckland and it's on the international call list as a special trip to visit when arriving in Auckland. What more can I say!!

Every trip around is an enjoyable experience and every trip is different so if you want to be part of this unique opportunity put your name forward now and come along for a go!

P.S. I would still be doing it if it were not for some health issues! "

Sue and Ian Brice

I also asked our two newest members Sue and Ian Brice how they joined the Wiri Rambler team. They write:

"Ian and Sue Brice from Pukekohe became interested in volunteering at the Botanic Gardens after reading about the Friends activities and in particular, the Wiri Rambler group, in a newsletter they picked up at the Gardens. They met with Kate [Moodie] who told them about the Rambler and how it worked, and with Ian's horticultural background and Sue's

love of gardening, it seemed to be right up their alley. Operating small tractors was easy enough for Ian, and Sue took to being a guide very quickly. Sue found the guide notes to be a good basis for the journey but adds her own bent to what can be seen along the paths.

Unfortunately, they only did one day before COVID came along, and then had to wait for a couple of years to get back to welcoming people on board. They love meeting the variety of people, especially families that fill the Rambler through the afternoon. With the new ticketing system, filling the seats is even easier and trouble free."

Kate Moodie

Wiri Rambler volunteers wanted

Anyone wanting more information or is interested in possibly joining our team please phone Kate Moodie, ph. 297 7234.

We are planning a day when people can come, ride on the Rambler, find out what

is involved and meet members of our friendly team. If you are interested please contact me or Paul Swift at the Botanic Gardens, ph. 09 267 1457.



Networking with rose breeders

In mid-December Mark Fielder and I travelled to Whanganui with the support of the Friends to visit Matthews Roses. We were lucky enough to be there around 4 hours, with Bob, Cath and Samantha Matthews giving us a full tour of the growing fields, grafting process, hybridising process, trial fields and the display fields. It was interesting to learn that they have very similar growing conditions to us, with clay soils, wind exposure and drainage challenges, so the plants that we receive from them should be better able to adapt to their new home when planted at the Botanic Gardens.

There are some beautiful new roses coming through in the trials, both Bob's own roses and those from international breeders, so hopefully they pass the health tests and make it to the market. There is a rigorous trial process, with only the healthiest roses making it through

to be released into garden centres. Unfortunately, some of the beautiful cultivars that do well overseas don't adapt well to our humid summers and warmer winters, and so do not make the cut.

We were able to talk with them about where we are heading with the Rose Collection at the Botanic Gardens and the direction that we are taking to promote local growers and cultivars that have been bred to deal with New Zealand conditions. They have offered their support, and they are also keen to demystify rose growing for the home gardener so that people are more confident in incorporating roses into easy-to-manage mixed plantings.

The following day we visited Paloma Gardens, where Mark saw lots of exciting plants and combinations to give him some new ideas for the Palm Collection. Paloma is a real foliage garden, with texture,

Matthews Roses display field



colour and form being used to create a dynamic landscape where flowers are a secondary bonus rather than the main display. It was interesting being able to compare plants that we have in our Palm Garden with the same plants growing in Whanganui, particularly looking at older specimens as an indicator of how our collection may look in the future.

On our way back to the airport we stopped in at the Dugald MacKenzie Rose Garden in Palmerston North, which is home to the New Zealand Rose Society International

Trial Rose Grounds as well as a large traditional formal display garden and the Plant Variety Rights (PVR) collection. The grounds are immaculately kept and are well worth a visit (although be aware that in the interest of impartiality the trial roses are given a code rather than their cultivar name until after the two-year trial has been completed).

Thank you again to the Friends for your support. Being able to visit the Matthews and talk with them in person has been very constructive.

Joanna Mason

The wonderful world of salvias

Betsy Glebsch, a well-known salvia enthusiast, collector and author of *A book of salvias* describes salvias as plants of innate beauty and bearing. Betsy is quite right, the genus *Salvia* is diverse, and this diversity can be seen in their fragrance, bloom, habit and flower colour. Salvias belong to the Family *Lamiaceae* or mint family with over 900 species of *Salvia*, making it the biggest genus in the mint family.

The vast geographical distribution of salvias from Europe, Asia, Middle East, Mediterranean, Africa, Balkans and Americas including Mexico add to their diversity. Over 200 species of salvias are endemic (naturally occurring) to Mexico. Their natural habitats include open rocky terrain, woodlands, dry scrub, damp and grassy meadows. The many *Salvia* species are diverse in their growth habits being

perennials, biennials, annual herbs, or evergreen or deciduous shrubs.

The word salvia comes from the Latin word *salvare*; meaning to heal or to save, this refers to the few salvias with medicinal properties. The most popular or well-known salvia is *Salvia officinalis* or common sage. Sage is a low growing perennial shrub, well known for its culinary and medicinal properties. In its natural environment of the Mediterranean and Asia Minor sage grows in well drained, less fertile and dry soils.

Because of its medicinal virtues sage was a popular garden plant in early times, cultivated for centuries in England, France, Germany, Spain and Italy. Poor Italian farmers of the early centuries had a saying "Without sage we are dead". Sage was an easy plant for the farmers to

grow as a culinary and medicinal plant. Scientific evidence concludes that sage is rich in antioxidants, so the poor Italians were right in saying that sage helped with their longevity.

Salvias' many forms, blooms and colour together with easy maintenance and cultivation make them excellent plants for the home garden. One way to extend the flowering season is to plant salvias, as different salvias can be found in bloom at anytime of the year. Those suitable for Auckland gardens are the species native to California, Mexico, Central and South America and southern Africa.

Low growing salvias like *S. nemorosa* and its many cultivars (cvs) make valuable additions to a small perennial border. First flowers appear in spring and usually last up to four weeks. Cut back the first flush of flowers to ground, saving the new flower spikes and they will reward you with another one or two flushes of flowers in one season. The following are great performers as well as having beautiful flowers: *S. nemorosa*, *Salvia* 'Amethyst', *Salvia* 'Snow Hills', *Salvia* 'Blue Hills' and *Salvia* 'Plumosa'.

'Guanajuato' is one of the best *S. patens* cvs: it has deep blue flowers and the flower spikes reach 50 cm. It is also resistant to powdery mildew, an advantage as some *S. patens* cultivars are susceptible to powdery mildew. *S. patens* 'Southern Belle' has beautiful lilac flowers with flower spikes reaching 40 cm.

Medium sized salvia shrubs that perform well in Auckland are those from South Africa and the Americas, including Mexico. *S. africana-lutea* 'Kirstenbosch' has long golden brown flowers: it flowers late in winter lasting about six weeks. *S. microphylla* has beautiful foliage with orange-red flowers: it flowers all season, peaking in late spring and autumn. Cut these back to a third in late winter to give them a rest and to promote fresh growth. *S. greggii* and cultivars are great additions to the perennial garden. The flowers range from soft pastel yellows to pink to hot mauves. Replace *S. greggii* every three years, as it tends to get woody. *S. splendens* 'Van Houttei' adds drama to the autumn garden with its rich red flowers.

Salvia nemorosa 'Violet Riot'



Tall salvias such as *S. madrensis* can be placed at the back of the border or in the middle. The long yellow flower spikes add colour in late autumn to early winter when most flowering perennials and annuals are coming to the end of their flowering season. *S. involucrata* has many cultivars that flower from late spring to mid-winter and have flowers in various shades of pinks. *S. confertiflora* is another good performer, bearing long red flower spikes from November – early winter.

S. leucantha is a sprawling herbaceous salvia with flower spikes reaching 1.3 m long. The deep violet flowers and calyces appear from late spring till the frosts slow them down.

There are few annual salvias that also grow well in containers. Some annuals will flower for the whole season. Look out for the following at garden centres: *S. coccinea*, *S. farinacea* 'Victoria Blue', *S. roemeriana* and *S. splendens*.

Many salvias will grow easily and are easy to maintain but beware: some will take over the garden if not kept in check. Salvias that spread such as *S. madrensis* and *S. involucrata* can be kept under control by digging out last season's clump each year. Plant one or two plants in the garden, and they will produce new clumps every year.

Salvias will tolerate any soil if they are situated in a sunny location with good drainage, but there are a few salvias that will perform well in semi-shade conditions; they include *S. buchannii* and *S. miniata*.

Salvia leucantha 'Purple Glow'



The best time to cut back salvias is four to six weeks after flowering, except the frost-tender ones which can be cut back when the weather warms up or on the first sign of spring. Most salvias are drought-tolerant, but they will need watering on long hot summer days to keep them looking their best. Mulching will help conserve moisture. Keep the mulch away from the crown to reduce pest and disease infestations as well help alleviate crown rot.

Salvia madrensis

If you feel inspired about growing salvias in your garden then visit the Perennials, Rock Garden, African Garden, and the existing Salvia Garden to get ideas. Salvias are easy to grow and maintain, and with their great diversity you'll be sure to find one that suits you. Grow salvias: they will make you a great gardener!

Mere Brewer

Clebsch, B. *A book of salvias* (Timber Press, 1997)

Sutton, J. *The gardener's guide to growing salvias* (Timber Press, 1999)



Sichuan pepper - *Zanthoxylum simulans*

Pepper has been the most significant spice for centuries. It was the incentive to explore the world and develop new trade routes. Several different plants have been given the name of pepper.

I think one of the most interesting peppers is the Sichuan (Szechuan) pepper *Zanthoxylum simulans*, sometimes called prickly ash. It is not related to black pepper, but to plants in the citrus family (Rutaceae). Although many may think you have not tried this plant, if you have ever eaten a Chinese takeaway, you will have. It is an essential ingredient in most 5-spice powders, along with star anise, fennel seeds, whole cloves and cinnamon stick.

There are a couple of Sichuan pepper plants in the Botanic Gardens; one in the Kiwi Backyard, the other amongst the magnolias. In both cases they are planted in the middle of the bed, and not that easily touched from the path; look at the plant and you will understand why. The thorns as well as the red berries or seed husks in autumn help to identify the tree. The edible part is the berry follicle (husk) when it has split open and the black seed has been allowed to fall out. The dried red husks of the berries can be bought in most Asian food shops. After you have used it a few times you can identify it by its distinctive odour.

Sichuan food is traditionally very hot and spicy, with these flavours coming from the Sichuan pepper. Nowadays, the ordinary black pepper and capsicum are also used, as well as the *Zanthoxylum*, the original traditional pepper. The spice is not only

hot; it also numbs the mouth, causes your tongue to tingle and has a distinctive fragrance. Be cautious if you do try one of the fruit as you may find the sensation unpleasant.

At least one other species of this genus is available in some New Zealand garden centres and connoisseurs claim that each has a slightly different taste. However, I haven't noticed different varieties of the edible pepper for sale. They can be bought in most supermarkets, but if you want to get larger amounts, do go to Chinese shops.

Some references refer to needing male and female trees; however, the single tree in the Edible Garden produced a good number of fruit these past few years. The tree in the Magnolia Garden was less prolific, but that may have been because it is in a more shady area. The trees can grow large and whippy. However, they can be pruned hard and I have heard of them being made into bonsais. Last winter, Angela Anstis, the Edible Gardener, pruned back the tree in the Kiwi Backyard, by almost half. It has grown well and flowered again this year.

This pepper is definitely used for flavour, but has been used in Traditional Chinese Medicine, and according to different references, it is supposed to help with blood circulation and lower blood pressure. Also, it has antifungal and antibacterial properties and helps with arthritis pain. However, these properties have not been scientifically proven although they are being investigated.

If you wish to find out more about the Sichuan pepper I suggest you look at Fuchsia Dunlop's book *Shark's Fin and Sichuan Pepper, a Sweet-Sour Memoir of Eating in China* which is available as an e-book from the Auckland Library.

Do look out for this tree when you are next in the Edible or Magnolia Garden's.

Kathrina Muller



Potting mix and Legionnaire's Disease

There are many sources of infection but anyone who works with bagged or bulk organic material such as garden soil, compost, mulch, or potting mix is at risk of inhaling the bacterium which causes Legionnaire's Disease (Legionellosis).

Early symptoms are mild flu-like symptoms, including: muscle aches; headache; tiredness; chills; shortness of breath; loss of appetite; coughing; stomach pain; diarrhoea; and mental confusion.

If you think you have become affected seek medical attention immediately. Infections can be serious for the elderly, smokers, heavy drinkers and those who are immuno-compromised. Men are more commonly affected. Fortunately, the disease does not seem that common, but can be very nasty.

Legionnaire's Disease gets its name from the outbreak where it was first identified, at a 1976 American Legion convention in Philadelphia.

Recommended precautions for gardeners include:

- Wear mask and gloves. Masks seem particularly important and are recommended to reduce the risk of fungal and bacterial aerosols, and dust nuisance. The Botanic Gardens stipulates at least a P2 dust mask in the Nursery; P2s and N95s are best as a general recommendation.
- Keep bags of potting mix stored out of direct sunlight so that they do not become warm. Ideal temperatures for Legionella bacterial growth are 20–40°C.
- Water gardens and composts gently, using a low-pressure hose.
- Do not shake bags before opening as this will create dust. Open bags of compost and potting mix slowly, making sure the opening is directed away from your face. Avoid opening bags in enclosed areas.
- When working in enclosed areas, greenhouses, potting sheds, or indoors generally, make sure the working area is well ventilated.
- When potting plants, wet the compost, potting mix, soil to reduce dust.
- Avoid sweeping dust from bulk garden soil, compost, mulch, or potting mix. Sweeping may send dust into the air that could be inhaled. If sweeping is the only option, dampen the material (with a low-pressure hose) before sweeping.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling compost, potting mixes, or soils, even if you have been wearing gloves.

Ross Ferguson

Japanese raisin tree - *Hovenia dulcis*

An interesting tree in the Botanic Gardens is the Japanese raisin tree. It is not well known in New Zealand but deserves to be. There are three specimens of this unusual tree in the Botanic Gardens. The most easily found is in the Edible Garden, in the Rain Garden section, planted over 20 years ago.

The common name of Japanese raisin tree is due to the tasty swollen pedicels (fruit stalks) that develop in June and July that taste like raisins. Other people have compared the flavour to pears, and a common Chinese name is chi-chao meaning "chicken-claw pear."¹

I have eaten the "fruit" (from my own tree) using the fresh fruit stalks in salads, and have trialled drying them. I have read they can be made into beverages. Although the tree is hardy and can take frost, the fruit stalks need enough warm temperature to make sure they ripen and develop enough sugar. In Auckland the fruit stalks are certainly palatable. I was leading some friends through the Auckland Botanic Gardens when ripe "raisins" were falling to the ground and suggested they try some. I then had to wait while they scoured the ground for any they could collect. Some birds enjoy the "raisins", including my hens who will eat what falls to the ground in their run.

In January the flowers are small cream/white and not very conspicuous on this deciduous tree. However, some afternoons the sound of the bees on the flowers is as noisy as a swarm. In autumn it loses its leaves and the fruit stalks start

falling to the ground, but they can also be picked direct from the tree using a tool such as a pole pruner to cut the smaller branches that have the swollen brown fruit stalks. However, I have decided to coppice my tree and keep it to a height that I can easily pick all the "raisins". I have friends who have grown this tree in a large pot and collected the swollen "raisins" so I am sure this is possible.

Not only does this tree produce edible produce, but even more interestingly this tree has been used in Traditional Chinese Medicine since at least the seventh century.¹ An important use was for liver problems and specifically for treating hangovers, and the effects of too much alcohol. Modern research has identified active ingredients, which show potential not only for traditional liver problems but also liver cancer, Alzheimers, Parkinsons, post-traumatic stress disorder, osteoporosis and diabetes.^{2, 3} In the last couple of years I have heard advertised on the radio supplements made from *Hovenia* that are supposed to help sufferers get over hangovers.

Traditionally a sweet extract of the seeds, twigs and young leaves has been used as a substitute for honey.⁴ The use of its leaves as an herbal tea has also been recommended.

The origin of the tree is Asia, but where exactly is unknown. Its cultivation has spread early to other parts of Asia including Japan, hence its common New Zealand name. In recent years it has been a popular choice in some forestry projects

as it grew as fast as eucalyptus, and allowed other trees to grow close by. The wood can be used for building construction and for furniture.⁵ Although I haven't found any direct information, I believe that it would coppice easily, as the literature does suggest it will re-sprout if cut down or damaged. It has been reported that in some areas, such as Brazil and Tanzania, it has become a weed. Although the tree has been growing for over 20 years in the Edible Garden, seedlings were not seen until an area behind the tree was cleared, and suddenly a lot of seedlings grew up in the disturbed ground. The Growing Friends hope to have some of these seedlings available soon.

If you are in the Edible Garden this autumn, do check out the *Hovenia dulcis* and if you get a chance try out the raisins.

Kathrina Muller

¹ <https://herbaria.plants.ox.ac.uk/bol/plants400/Profiles/GH/Hovenia>

² <https://new.use.edu/147428/traditional-chinese-cure-potential-alzheimers-disease-treatment>

³ <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/46dfe564caaedd3383c4d365>

⁴ Stephen Facciola *Cornucopia: a source book of edible plants*, Kampong Publications, 1990

⁵ <https://temperate.theferns.info/plant/Hovenia+dulcis>

Hovenia dulcis in the Edible Garden



Visiting rātā moehau

One of the first conservation projects I heard about after starting my role here at ABG was the rātā moehau (Bartlett's rātā, *Metrosideros bartlettii*), a white-flowering rātā from the Far North, reduced to only 13 wild trees as of the last published survey in 2015. Auckland Botanic Gardens has committed to holding a "library" of genetic material in the form of living trees and propagating these to distribute back to Ngāti Kuri, the iwi whose rohe houses this endemic species.

I was lucky enough to be invited to the Far North in November 2022 to share updates on the progress of this project and visit sites of the newly planted trees and some of the last remaining wild ones. A group assembled to talk pollination techniques and further steps from here, including Sheridan Waitai, Tammy Tauroa and others from the Ngāti Kuri team; Cate Macinnis-Ng of the University of Auckland and her student Genevee Rhodes; and Carlos Lehnebach, Botany Curator at Te Papa.

This was my first journey this far to the north of New Zealand, so on the first day we couldn't help but drive straight up to the lighthouse at Te Rerenga Wairua / Cape Reinga – it was a perfect spring day and the views were immense, all the way to Mānawātāwhi / Three Kings Islands. I was starting to get a sense of the unique and remarkable natural spaces here.

On arrival back at the Te Paki station we were greeted warmly and I handed over my precious cargo of five more seedlings, the result of pollination work here at the

Botanic Gardens. Once we all settled in there was time for another jaunt to the Cape for sunset and some education on the history of Ngāti Kuri and their current conservation projects.

On day two we set off to Kohuronaki, one of the three remaining sites with wild trees of rātā moehau. We drove from paved road to gravel road, then cross-country on a side-by-side down a hiking trail, then abruptly turning to plunge down a gully on foot, slipping in the leaf litter and lowering ourselves on supplejack vines until finally reaching the stream and our first rātā sighting. These trees often start their lives as epiphytes perched on other trees before sending down roots and establishing their own base. This one had started on a pūriri tree that had since fallen, laying out across the stream. The rātā, with its distinctive papery bark, is wrapped around the fallen trunk and continuing to grow up into the forest canopy.

Further on to the swampy low point of the gully was a larger tree. There was new epicormic growth sprouting from branches and near the base, suggesting low possum numbers in the area. Northland was one of the last areas of New Zealand to be invaded by possums but we had seen evidence of their presence as there were several squashed on the road locally.

Seeing these two wild mature trees in their lush forest home was an incredible privilege, and really drove home the vital nature of our conservation goals. I couldn't

have asked for a better introduction to this conservation project, which served as a true spark of motivation for this part of my role at the Botanic Gardens.

In the afternoon we went to visit two sites where trees had been planted, and ended our evening fireside with our hosts. They shared their history and future plans for development of the local community and environment. They emphasised not only wanting to obtain knowledge for today's issues but also retain it for the future, building skills and capacity within their iwi. Hearing them speak builds a real hope for the future of the critically threatened rātā moehau.

However, there are many obstacles to face on the way to nourishing and strengthening its population. These include the newly established myrtle rust, *Austropuccinia psidii*; herbivores ranging from bronze beetles to possums;

finding suitable planting sites that will link existing sites to enable natural cross-pollination; and their reduced genetic diversity. This last issue applies to many endangered species, from cheetahs to kākāpō – generally, reduced genetic diversity in a population reduces their ability to adapt to new challenges. This is where the genetic library that the Botanic Gardens holds comes into play, stocking that genetic diversity for future cross-breeding and hopefully ensuring our success.

If you want to see one of these trees in person, there are some on display in the Gardens – look on the left as you enter the Threatened Native Plant Garden or for a more mature specimen, planted in 1991, cross the road at the rear of the Logan Campbell building and head to the bottom (NE) corner of that lawn. They flower once every few years around late November.

Ella Rawcliffe

"Indianna Jones meets Treasure Island"

This was the heading of a book review in *The Telegraph* of *The Plant Hunter* by Thomas Mogford, Welbeck, London/Sydney, 2022.

Thomas Mogford has written a series of crime novels with Spike Sanguinetti as the main character. He is a lawyer from Gibraltar who leads a complicated life, both personally, with a series of girlfriends, and professionally with his business partner having a rather dubious understanding of legal ethics. Critics

have complimented Mogford on his engaging writing and his sense of place but have found his plotting often rather unconvincing.

The Plant Hunter is a very different book, Mogford's first historical novel. There's plenty of excitement with murder, opium addicts, pirates, ferocious Miao and underhand dealing. The main character is Harry Compton, a handsome young salesman at a nursery on The King's Road, Chelsea, London. The date is 1867.

Harry is a nice lad if somewhat volatile and short-tempered. He is ambitious and dissatisfied with his role at the nursery. He is clearly a committed plantsman. He befriends an opium-addicted Irishman, a collector of plants in China, who conveniently dies from an opium overdose but gifts Harry a vasculum and a dried specimen of an utterly fabulous tree which "makes *Magnolia grandiflora* look like a roadside weed". This is the flower and leaves of the icicle tree last described by Marco Polo. There is also a hand-drawn, distinctly crude map of INLAND CHINA bisected by an uneven line, the YANG-TZE RIVER, a few placenames and a small black cross, labelled "icicle tree".

This is all reminiscent of the map that the plant collector E.H.Wilson received from Dr Augustine Henry on where to find the equally fabulous *Davidia involucrata*: "On a half-page of a notebook, Dr Henry had sketched a tract of country [some 20,000 square miles] about the size of New York State and had marked the spot where he had found growing a single tree of the *Davidia* ...".

There the similarity almost ends. Wilson was sent to China by the leading nursery firm of the day and travelled in China with an extensive entourage of assistants. Harry decides to go to China by himself to make his fortune by bringing back the icicle tree into cultivation.

Harry sails to China, accompanied by Wilberforce, the dog of his murdered father – that's part of the excitement. He

arrives in Shanghai and meets up with Clarissa, the widow of his distant cousin. Clarissa has inherited her husband's opium trading business. Together they (and Wilberforce) set off to inland China to seek the icicle tree. After many vicissitudes, they find the stump of the recently felled icicle tree – again reminiscent of Wilson finding the stump of Dr Henry's *Davidia*.

Will they find a live icicle tree? Will they all survive the murderous Miao? How will Harry control his inappropriate reactions to the presence of Clarissa? No spoilers!

Mogford sets the scene convincingly: the nursery trade in Chelsea, the British establishment in Shanghai, the hongs dealing in opium, the opium dens, the travels in inland China where Europeans were definitely not welcome. He has clearly done his research – his description of a Wardian case is accurate. He even describes the preservation of seed in liquid honey. I haven't been able to confirm this but it sounds plausible, if messy.

Plant hunting has always sounded rather romantic, a "Boy's Own Annual" exploit. In reality, Harry continually thinks of how much he could get in London for every new plant he sees – 10/6 or even a guinea. Plant hunting was definitely a commercial business, even if the investment was great.

Good escapist reading. There are numerous copies available in the Auckland Library system.

Ross Ferguson

Chanticleer

A Garden where Art, Theatre and Horticulture Collide

Philadelphia is a city of gardens so is aptly named America's Garden Capital. Amongst the 38 gardens and arboreta is a 48-acre garden paradise, Chanticleer, which is situated in the affluent, rolling pastoral suburb of Wayne, a 40-minute drive west of Philadelphia City.

What started as a 7-acre private country retreat of Adolf Rosengarten Sr. in 1913 primarily to escape the Philadelphia summer heat had, by 1924, become a permanent residence for the Rosengarten family. The estate grew substantially when Adolf Sr. and his wife Christine gave their two children a house each, as wedding gifts, on adjoining properties. One of these properties, Minder, the house of Adolf Jr. and his wife Janet, was demolished in 1999 and is the site of the designed Ruin Garden today.

While Adolf Sr. had landscape architect Thomas Sears lay out the terraces and planted areas in the initial 7-acre site, it was Adolf Jr. and Janet who developed Chanticleer further. Adolf Jr. had an interest in horticulture, in fact he wanted to be a landscape architect only to be dissuaded by his father who advised him "the family needed a lawyer" (Thomas, 2015). Janet herself was a "serious gardener in her own right" (Thomas, 2015) and together Adolf and Janet planted the grounds full of flowers, trees, shrubs and a large vegetable garden. A tennis court and swimming pool were added to create a family home. The couple were focused on

preserving the property and surrounding pastoral landscape and avoiding it being built around by commercial interests. Adolf wrote, "This beautiful countryside should be treasured". To further protect Chanticleer, Adolf prepared well for the future by setting up a Foundation in 1976 and a Board to guide its development.

Adolf Jr. articulated the mission which remains in the Chanticleer Foundation Charter today – to operate the property as a beautiful public garden, maintain the Chanticleer House as a museum, and educate amateur and professional gardeners.

Chanticleer has evolved since those very early days. When I first visited in 1995, there were sweeping grass vistas, woodland and streamside gardens, a kitchen garden and a solid structure of mature deciduous trees. The swimming pool remained and there were formal lawns surrounding it. However, the tennis court was no longer, having been developed in 1990 into a formal arrangement of garden beds showcasing perennials.

The evolution of the gardens since that first visit has been nothing short of extraordinary. The sweeping vistas remain and have been enhanced by plantings that draw the visitor through the landscape, from the seasonal displays surrounding the house, through to the woodland gardens and streamside gardens at the bottom of the site. The swimming pool remains as does the extensive vegetable garden that has been extended with a cut flower garden. In many areas lawns

have been replaced by feature structures and plantings that make the best of the topography. Foliage, form, texture and colour are expertly interwoven to create a dynamic landscape. Artistry also lies in the landscape features, whether they be handrails along stairs and bridges, garden seats, gates, paved surfaces or additional features added for short stays these all add to the garden symphony.

Chanticleer feels like it has permanence, being grounded within the surrounding pastoral landscape by the woodlands and mature specimen trees. However, much of the garden is constantly changing. As an art gallery changes exhibitions, Chanticleer gardeners change the scenes in each of their areas, sometimes seasonally, sometimes more regularly or less often. The unifying presence is the

Executive Director who is tasked with ensuring the various scenes flow as one to create the masterpiece that is Chanticleer.

As a visitor, perhaps the first thing you notice is that there are no plant labels nor any signs outside of the necessary ones for the restrooms. An occasional silver plant tag can be seen flapping in the breeze, but they are few and far between. Initially, the absence of plant labels is confronting, especially for visitors used to botanic and public gardens. Behind the absence of plant labels is the Chanticleer culture to encourage dialogue between the visitor and staff – “there is so much more to know about a plant than just its appearance and its name on a label” writes Executive Director William (Bill) Thomas in his book *The Art of Gardening*. There is an advantage of course to a garden without

The old formal lawn is now a meadow



labels. The visitor is no longer furiously searching for labels to identify individual plants. By appreciating each individual scene in its entirety, perhaps as one would an artwork, you capture the beauty, the intricacy, the magic. To help those who need to know plant names are Plant List boxes dotted about which hold laminated lists for each garden area that visitors can reference. The website also holds these lists and if you like to walk with the list in hand visitors can purchase these on entry. Details matter. Chanticleer must “look spectacular every day” (Thomas, 2015) and it does. Wherever you are, from the road verge outside, to the carpark and to the outer reaches of the woodland areas the garden presents as spectacular, after all, “a good design becomes worthless if it is not maintained”.

Around corners there are features that surprise, delight and inspire. Containers are used around the house both for plants and as floating floral and foliage displays. Hanging baskets enhance the

house surrounds. The circular gravel entrance to the house is inspired by the Japanese gravel karesansui garden for contemplation. Weekly or daily patterns are raked by gardeners and in spring cherry blossoms float down to fill the raked channels. The once formal lawn is a designed flower meadow. Where once the lawn mower was commonplace, now pollinating insects hang out.

Adolf Jr. was quoted as saying “One of the great joys of my life has been gardening. It’s a wonderful way to express yourself. To create a garden is to search for a beautiful world. Every gardener is like Oscar Hammerstein’s Optimist, for the very act of planting is based on hope for a glorious future”. In Chanticleer today, Adolf Jr.’s vision is thriving, with the gardeners expressing themselves as a musician does and creating a landscape that comes alive as the movements of a symphony.

Thomas, R.W. *The art of gardening* Timber Press, 2015.

Barbara Wheeler

Designed as a ruin garden with a subtle and muted colour palette





Clockwise
from top left:
Pleroma mutabile,
Salvia argentea,
and from the Wintergardens
Echium wildpretii
and
Delphinium
'Pacific Giants'





The floral table arrangements at the Christmas Party for volunteers,
prepared by Jeff Jones and Pippa Lucas



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