FERNGLEN NATIVE PLANT GARDENS NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2025

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News from Fernglen

text and photos by Kelly Hayward

Fernglen's Open Day in April 2025 was a success, thanks to those involved on the day and behind the scenes. Consistent in the feedback received was the welcome reception visitors felt, the knowledgable guides (Nev and Steve), learning the history of the property and its beauty. Visitors were interested in Lesley's beautiful botanical art and the shy gecko, Aroha, who hid in the ponga, leaving only her tail for inspection.

Nev taking an afternoon botanical tour on the Open Day

Lucky us! Fernglen was randomly selected from a draw of other EcoFest hosts. We are grateful recipients of a $50 voucher from EcoMatters, 1 Olympic Place, New Lynn, (EcoMatters Environment Trust.org.nz). The store has a wide assortment of eco-friendly products which will be so useful. Thanks EcoMatters! As a not-for-profit charitable organisation, Fernglen gratefully benefits from donations and prizes. The committee and trust strive to be sustainable on a 'shoe string'. The benefit of not having administration fees is donations go directly to the upkeep and maintenance of the educational building and education of native flora and fauna.

Kākā have frequented the gardens recently, hanging out in the large old pōhutukawa (Metrosideros excelsa) tree close to the flowering *Tecomanthe speciosa.* It's lovely to see flowering natives in the winter, at Ben's Ridge, kūmarahou (*Pomaderris kumeraho*) flowers are prolific and obvious, in contrast to the subtle delicate beauty of kōtukutuku (*Fuchsia excorticata*) hanging down like tiny umbrellas.

Keep warm! Kind regards Kelly

Native fuschia, *Fuchsia excorticata*, kōtukutuku in flower. On the same tree flowers differ in colour.

Hebe brevifolia in flower

Planted at the pond near the stone seat, in 2012, by Verran Primary School in appreciation of Muriel Fisher, the kōwhai, *Sophora molloyi* tree had 3 flowers in May

Curator report

by Cameron Thomas

Maintenance

Unfortunately, the last of the three mature *Pomaderris hamiltonii* had to be removed following a rapid and irreversible decline in recent weeks. The cause is suspected to be verticillium wilt, a soil-borne fungal disease that blocks the plant's vascular system, leading to wilting, dieback, and ultimately death. Once infected, there is no effective cure, and sadly all three established specimens have now succumbed. Furthermore, the fungal spores can remain dormant in soil for years. One small Pomaderris remains on site and is just coming into bud. Hopefully, with viable seed we can ensure the species continues to have a presence at Fernglen. However, this species is known to be extremely fickle in its propagation, so along with cuttings and seeds, I plan to brush off my grafting skills and put some scions on our other Pomaderris species (acting as rootstock) to maximize our chances of preserving this plant. More details to follow.

Pomaderris hamiltonii photo taken almost 2 years ago (credit: Kelly Hayward)

The pergola renovations have been completed, with the benches extended to offer more seating for larger groups of visitors. A new watertight roof has also been installed, providing welcome shelter from dripping rain.

Recent heavy rainfall has had a noticeable impact on the landscape. The Parataniwha Glade shows signs of significant water flow, with reshaped ground and debris movement marking the force of recent downpours. Meanwhile, the top lawn has become quite boggy, visitors are advised to stick to the established paths where possible to avoid damaging the sodden turf.

Planting

One of the first beds to be replanted under my curatorship is the Carmichaelia (native broom) bed next to the stream. I have quite the soft spot for these curious members of the pea family and it has been a joy being able to showcase them. The three new plants (*C. williamsii*, *C. appressa*, *C. australis*) each showcase the distinctive morphology of the genus. Many species in this group forgo traditional leaves altogether, photosynthesising instead through their green stems (called phylloclades), yet can still put on quite the spring-time show with their delicate and colourful pea-like flowers.

Carmichaelia appressa (credit: Cameron Thomas)

Carmichaelia australis (credit: Cameron Thomas)

Carmichaelia williamsii (credit: Cameron Thomas)

A more unusual specimen, *Carmichaelia stevensonii* (commonly known as weeping broom), was also planted recently in one of the large concrete pots by the Alpine House. Although typically not known to thrive outside its native South Island range (confined to inland river valleys in Southern Marlborough), this young seedling is performing well. It displays a fascinating feature comparatively common here in Aotearoa, but relatively uncommon elsewhere around the world: heteroblasty, or the marked change in form between juvenile and mature growth stages. This specimen shows how immature Carmichaelia still tend to grow leaves on new shoots, but as they mature, they eventually drop what they have and learn to go without.

For ground cover, *Mentha cunninghamii* was selected - a tough, endemic mint species well suited to rock garden conditions. As well as being hardy and spreading, it offers a soft, textural contrast between the structural forms of the carmichaelias.

Visitors

The recent open day was a great success, with a steady flow of visitors enjoying the gardens, plants, and tours. Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, and the event was further buoyed by a healthy number of plant sales - always a welcome outcome in support of ongoing conservation and education efforts here at Fernglen.

Everything went off without a hitch; though visitors did lament about the lack of kākā, who, in classic diva fashion, only decided to show up to Fernglen several weeks after the event.

Flowering / Fruiting

The *Tecomanthe speciosa* is currently in excellent form, smothered in blooms and drawing plenty of attention with its showy display. The kōtukutuku, or *Fuchsia excorticata*, is just finishing up, though there are still a few of its striking deep purple flowers tucked among the foliage if you look closely.

The *Elingamita johnsonii* located just behind the Alpine House, continues to surprise us with its productivity, now entering its third fruiting phase within the last six months. Meanwhile, tucked away in the northern part of the main garden are a couple of *Pittosporum pimeleoides* coming into bud, with deliciously scented blooms soon to follow.

Elingamita johnsonii berries (credit: Kelly Hayward)

In the very centre of the gardens next to the pond bench, *Sophora molloyi* is also in flower. This species stands out from its more familiar spring-blooming relatives by putting on its floral display in the depths of winter, adding a welcome splash of yellow to the cooler season.

The Impact of the Extended Dry Summer on Some Motorway Plantings

by Neville Arbury

In the part of Auckland that I have lived for many years, there is an exit from the north-west motorway that takes you to Motat and the Great North Road. Initially this area was planted with a range of native plants, but since planting, the area has been completely unattended leading to an invasion of foreign plants, especially privet and wattle. As the native planting occurred around 10-15 years ago the plants have become established and usually over summer, quite resistant to the hot dry month of January and February. However this year, as the draught extended well into March and early April, many species began to show signs of distress, and in some instances deaths were noticed. Of most surprise were two species that I regard as very hardy in dry conditions, *Griselina lucida* and *Pittosporum crassifolium*. Both, by early March, had lost the glossy appearance of their leaves, and the pittosporum was now covered in fruit, a sure sign of stress. There are numerous specimens of *Coprosma robusta* in this area, some planted, others have self-seeded. Around one third of the specimens died in this period. Manukas suffered a similar fate, 10 year old plants turned completely brown covered in dead leaves. While the Ngaio did not die, the leaves completely lost their glossy appearance and there were many dead branches. Whau suffered severely. There are numerous whau specimens in this part of the motorway, at least one third died during late summer. The karaka, hopefully will recover, but were defoliated on numerous branches.

And what were the survivors? - As you can guess the wattles and privets both continuing to thrive in the harsh conditions. Sadly, with a little care, some mulching, even some supplementary watering, most if not all of these native plants could have survived. The rain eventually arrived in mid-April but sadly it was too late for many plants.

Coastal Plants of Kangaroo Island – South Australia

by Neville Arbury

On a recent visit to Kangaroo Island, forty-five minutes off the east coast of South Australia, I was fascinated by the variety of sturdy coastal plants and the manner in which they had adapted to the following conditions:

- Poor soil, very low in nutrients
- Low rainfall and long hot, dry summers
- The likelihood of being grazed by local animals
- Exposure to salt-laden winds

Many of the coastal plants on Kangaroo Island displayed classic characteristics of such plants, grey or silver leaf colour, small leaves, compact form and extensive root systems.

Coastal plants play an important role in the islands ecosystem, providing habitat and food for wildlife and helping to stabilise coastal soil and sand dunes.

Some of the more interesting coastal plants that I observed included:

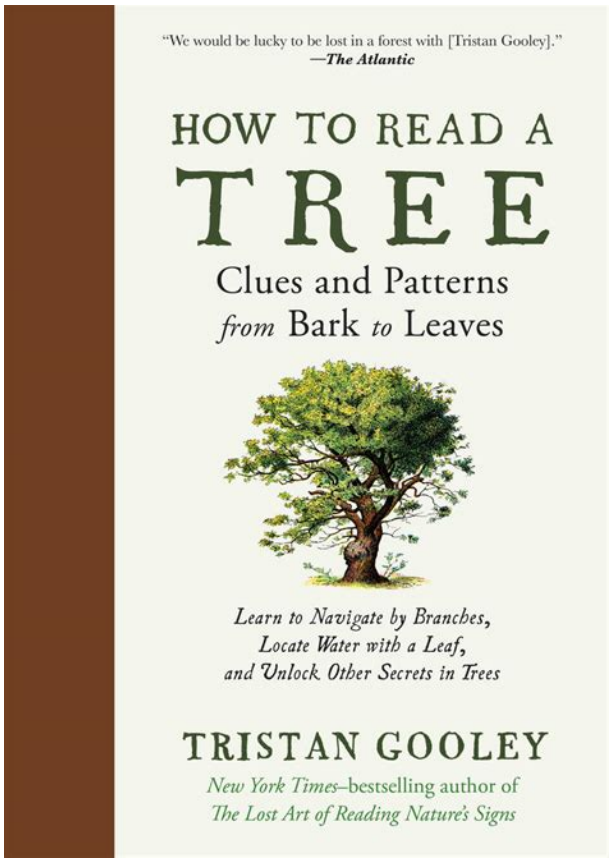
- Grey Saltbush
- Coastal wattle (*Acacia longifolia*)
- Eucalyptus species – various mallees
- Tea trees – *Leptospermum* species
- Melaleucas – paperbarks
- Pig face – *Carpobrotus rossii*

My favourite plant while driving around Kangaroo Island, while not specifically a coastal plant, was *Xanthorrhoea semiplana var. Tateana*, Yate's grass tree! This plant is quite spectacular in its juvenile form and even more spectacular when fully mature with a distinctive trunk growing to three metres.

I noted *Coprosma repens*, our native taopata thriving on the island, where it is considered a weed. Apparently it was introduced from New Zealand in 1858 and became a popular hedge plant. While not requiring enforced control on the island, the focus is on containing its spread in coastal areas.

Book Review: *How to Read a Tree: Clues and Patterns from Roots to Leaves* by Tristan Gooley

by Neville Arbury



Fundamentally, this publication sets out to explain the shapes and patterns you can see in trees and what they mean. The secrets about the life of an individual tree and the landscape they are found in. As the author writes early in the book,

"Trees are keen to tell us so much, they tell us about the land, the water, the people, the animals, the weather and time, and they tell us about their lives, the good bits and the bad."

> *Almost every chapter attempts to answer the basic question, what makes trees so good at surviving in nature?*

Author Tristan Gooley has been teaching people the art of reading trees for over two decades and is known for his innovating methods of looking at trees. He introduces the concept of trees following one of two strategies, that he terms 'the hare or tortoise'. The 'hares' are called pioneers, trees that produce millions of tiny seeds that land on bare earth and grow quickly, e.g. willows and poplars. The 'tortoises' are known as 'climax trees' and take a different approach. They produce much bigger seed and play the 'long game;, e.g. oaks.

Among the many fascinating chapters are the following:

- A Tree is a Map
- Wind Footprints
- Baric Signs
- The Missing Branches
- Shape Shifting Leaves
- The Hidden Seasons

A somewhat different publication relating to trees, but a fascinating read. Very thought provoking. Highly recommended.

A close Look at Some of our More Unusual Native Climbers. The Bush Lawyers

by Neville Arbury

Climbers are some of the more intriguing plants found not only in New Zealand but throughout the world. Intriguing is that they require support in order to grow and reach a position where they can receive sufficient light and finally flower.

There are a number of ways climbers can attach themselves to other plants or means of support. Some have tendrils that secure the climber to the support, others have twisting stems that achieve the same outcome. Incredibly, some climbers produce what is termed 'adhesive pads' that can stick to solid surfaces. Reasonably common are climbers that produce aerial roots which successfully penetrate supports, and in the case of our native bush lawyers, hooks are produced that easily attach to surrounding plants.

Often bush lawyers, our native rubus species, go unnoticed until you become attached to them when tramping through the bush! While related to other berry plants, the fruit that appear to be luscious, are very sour and bitter, certainly not recommended eating.

Bush lawyer at Fernglen Gardens

There are five native species, all endemic to New Zealand:

Rubus australis, which is often referred to as the swamp lawyer as it is often located in swamps and forest margins, produces small white flowers in spring followed by red coloured fruit.

Rubus cissoides, found throughout New Zealand, produces panicles of white flowers in spring then red berries.

Rubus schmidelioides, widely distributed throughout New Zealand, typically found on the edges of forests is a vigorous growing climber reaching up to 10 meters. Green to white flowers are followed by yellow/orange fruit.

Rubus squarrosus, a near leafless climber, commonly found in open scrubland and on cliff faces. White flowers in spring are followed by red to orange fruit.

Rubus parvus, only found in alpine areas of the South Island, distinctive white flowers and bright red fruit.

Autumn, the Time of the Year for Our Native Climber, *Tecomanthe speciosa* to commence flowering

by Neville Arbury

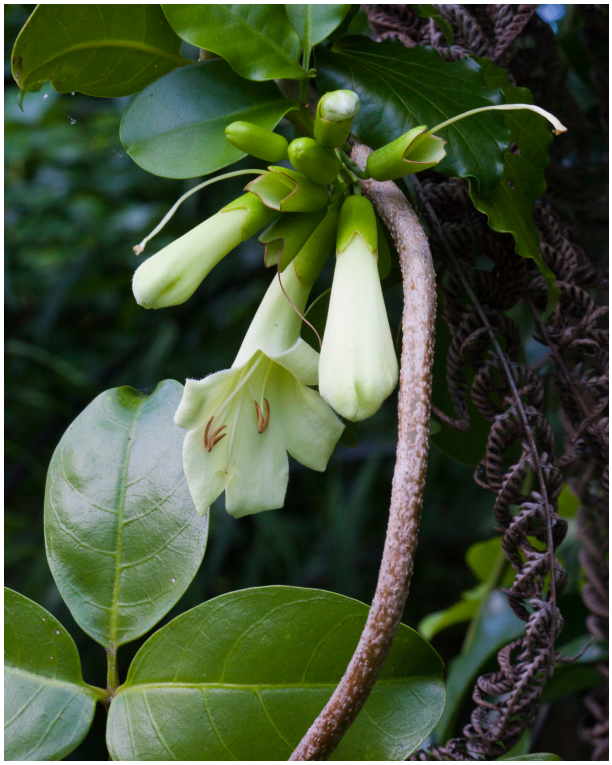
Our rare native climber *Tecomanthe speciosa*, flowers from April through to early June, with flowers often emerging from quite thick branches. The large cream coloured flowers, tubular in shape regularly appear in clusters.

Only found on Goat Island in the Three King's group, it was first discovered in 1945 when only one vine was still surviving. Apparently goats were responsible for the near extinction of this remarkable plant. Now readily available in garden centres, there is a need for patience after planting this climber and waiting for it to flower. There can be a time lag of up to seven years, in which the climber will have grown many metres. *Tecomanthe speciosa* is an incredibly vigorous plant, and therefore requires considerable space in a home garden.

Just prior to flowering in autumn, with mature plants, a seed capsule resembling a very large broad bean ripens and releases vast numbers of winged, flattened seeds perfect for wind disposal of this species.

Fortunately, tecomanthes are comparatively straight forward to propagate with seed germinating in a few weeks after sowing.

The very old specimen at Fernglen, now believed to be over seventy years is still vigorously spreading into surrounding native trees and shrubs. It is easy to locate at the top of the old garden near the grass area.



Tecomanthe speciosa waiting to flower and then flowering.

What's Happening at Fernglen?

Working bees

Regardless of the weather, working bees occur at Fernglen **on the second Saturday of every month from 9am onwards, until about 12 noon**.

The working bee is a great way to meet others, learn more about native plants, weeds and pest control. There is always a job to be done in the garden or in the education room.

No gardening experience is necessary and all ages and abilities are welcome. Gloves and gardening tools can be supplied.

Looking forward to seeing you there.

Educational tours

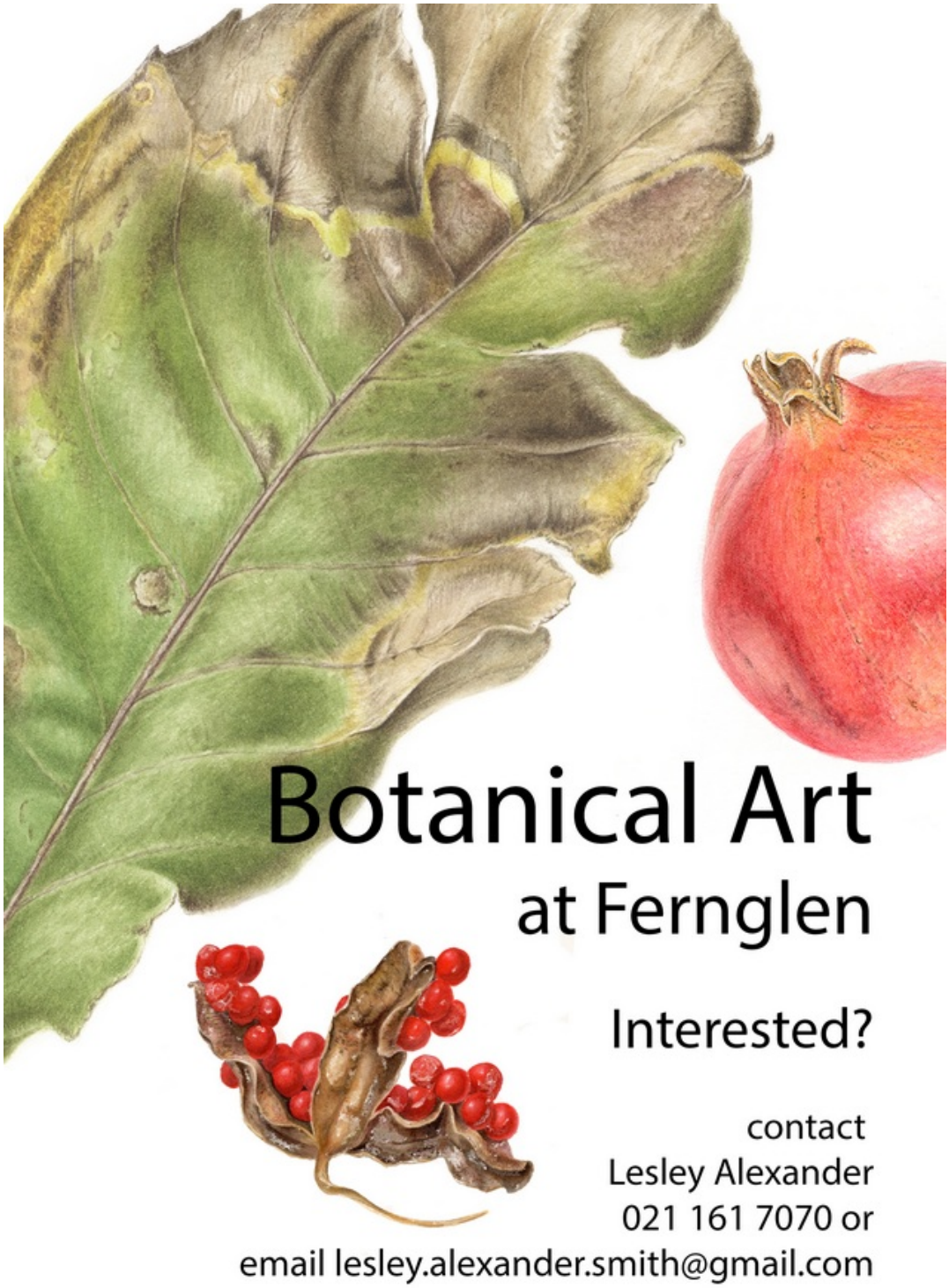
Are you involved with a school or an education group and would like to learn about New Zealand native plants? A unique collection of plants from all over New Zealand grows at Fernglen. To see what is on offer please contact us

on email: fernglen.nz@gmail.com
or phone: 021 236 5800

Room hire

The Fernglen Education Room is available for hire at very competitive rates. Please contact us

on email: fernglen.nz@gmail.com
or phone: 021 236 5800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