

FERNGLEN NATIVE PLANT GARDENS NEWSLETTER

Winter 2025

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Curator Report

text and photos by Cameron Thomas

Maintenance

It seems I spoke too soon in my last curator report about the *Pomaderris hamiltonii*. The last survivor I had high hopes for has followed the fate of its kin and, unfortunately, decided to give up on life shortly after writing my report. You can have all the plans in the world but sometimes nature just decides to take its own course. We do, however, plan to source some replacements soon. A different site will likely be chosen, as the fungal spores that led to the demise can persist in the soil for many years.

The wind and the rain hasn't been very forgiving either. With numerous trees coming down in the last couple of months, a lot of work has been done to keep the paths clean, safe, and walkable and we will continue this focus moving into summer. At this time, the stairs around the southern entrance are to remain closed to visitors after recent slips during winter, exposing the foundations of the recently renovated stairs. The Council is looking into viable options going forward.

We also want to recognise the tremendous effort put in by our volunteers and members from the St Mary's Youth group on our working bee earlier in September. Although we didn't have as many people as expected, a huge amount of mulch - about a cubic metre - was tirelessly lugged from one side of the property to the other. The plants up on Ben's Ridge are looking much tidier and are benefiting from the added moisture retention, all in preparation for the hot and dry summer ahead. As always, our thanks go out to our amazing volunteers, without whom these large projects wouldn't be possible.

Development

Meetings and talks have begun around renovating the Alpine House, an area of the gardens that has certainly been showing its age. Many of you will have noticed the sunken benches, which have been slowly sinking further downwards. While replacing the benches is the first priority, we hope to accomplish a bit more with this area in order to restore the Alpine House to its former glory, and return to being able to showcase some of our unique alpine flora in Auckland.

Planting

Along with mulching, the fernhouse and the path leading up to it also received a makeover on the volunteer day. A total of 28 plants were added, a mixture of some familiar faces and a few exciting new additions to the garden. More ferns and associated plants are planned for this area over the next year or two, with the aim to help Fernglen live up to its name and further enhance our collection.

The plantings around the new bench seating are beginning to fill out nicely. The *Jovellana*, *Dianella*, and *Astelia* have taken off with their spring growth. Meanwhile, the recently planted Chatham Island Forget-Me-Not (*Myosotidium hortentsia*) is expected to become a striking feature plant for that area.

Visitors

The wind and the rain are still keeping many visitors away, but as we move into spring and the weather warms up and the days become less damp, we expect numbers to pick up. Feedback on the gardens is overwhelmingly positive, with comments of how tidy and lush the plants are looking as we come out of the wet and blustery winter period.

Flowering / Fruiting

Spring is in full swing, and many plants are beginning to show off their flowers. There are several eye-catching plants in the main gardens already putting on quite the springtime show.



Xeronema callistemon



Metrosideros carminea

At the main gate, the kōwhai (*Sophora microphylla*) is in full bloom, serving as a vibrant and iconic symbol of spring. In the rock gardens by the kiosk, the Poor Knight's Lily (*Xeronema callistemon*) is very hard to miss, with its striking red flower spikes on full display. The second specimen near the education room is not far behind with its own flowers. The Scarlet Rātā (*Metrosideros carminea*) is looking very lush and vibrant with the covering of prolific pink-red flowers, though please be cautious of the many bees feasting on its plentiful nectar. The handsome sedge, *Machaerina*

sinclarii, located through the gardens is also on display with its pendulous flower spikes that are a striking red-brown colour.

Some other species in the main garden due to start flowering in the coming weeks include many of our Hebes, *Pimelea longifolia*, Mairehau (*Leionema nudum*), Toru (*Toronia toru*), Korokio (*Corokia cotoneaster*), Ngaio (*Myoporum lateum*) and *Jovellana sinclarii*.



Machaerina sinclarii



Pomaderris kumeraho

Up on Ben's Ridge, the buds of the Kūmarahou (*Pomaderris kumeraho*) have finally broken open, and the plant, smothered densely in yellow flowers, serves as a sign that it's time to plant your kumara in the ground. We also have some of the *Olearia* species gearing up for spring; the *O. cheesemanii* near the top bench is leading the way this season with its white daisy-like flowers.



Olearia townsonii

Hidden Gems

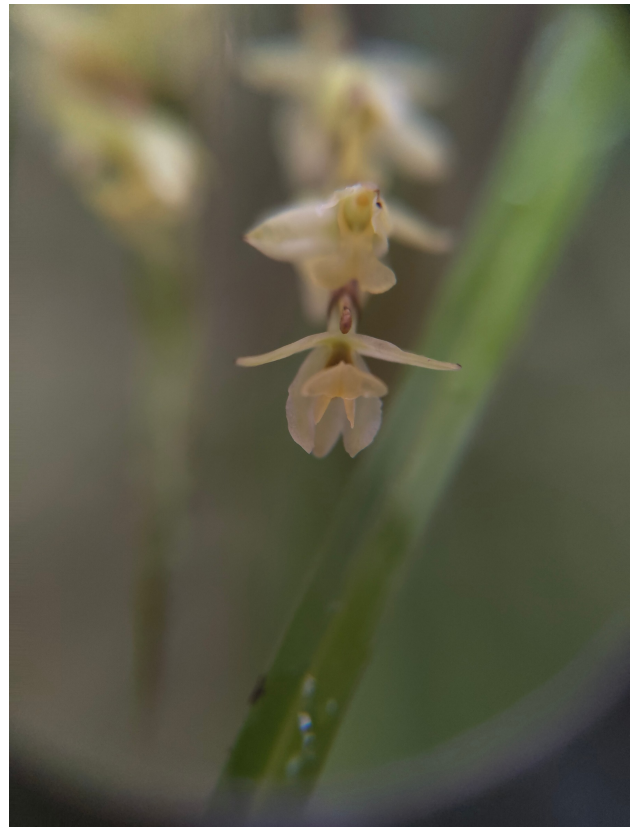
Aside from the showy, striking bloomers, there are a number of other species that might go unnoticed without a closer look. The *Clematis cunninghamii* on the trellis in the concrete pot behind the information kiosk - evidently a male plant - is laden with its diminutive off-white flowers that carry a delicate yet sweet floral aroma. Hanging off the large *Griselinia* next to the pergola is a native epiphytic bamboo orchid, Peka-a-waka (*Earina mucronata*), which is adorned with spikes of tiny orchid flowers. Although each flower is only a few millimeters, the clusters create a lovely splash of white and yellow, adding colour to an otherwise overlooked and inconspicuous plant.



Clematis cunninghamii



Earina mucronata



Earina mucronata through a hand lens

Up near the *Dracophyllum*, our often overlooked Koheriki (*Scandia rosifolia*) is currently covered in its carrot-like umbels of white flowers. This critically endangered native has a distinct anise-like aroma when crushed, and its edible fresh tips have been known to add some flair to a summer salad. In this area you can also find the various Horopito species (*Pseudowintera*) also in bloom, with their simple white flowers found close to the stem.



Scandia rosifolia



Scandia rosifolia closeup



Pseudowintera axillaris

Is There an Ideal Street Tree for Auckland?

by Neville Arbury

As you drive around various suburbs of Auckland, you quickly become aware of the range of trees that have been planted in berms, sometimes growing healthily, but sadly and all too often, in very poor condition. This can relate to a number of factors. Incorrectly chosen species, poor planting technique, no follow up / 'aftercare', damage from mowing, weed eaters and having holes cut in the canopies for power lines. Every summer countless street trees die through lack of water, the past summer providing ample evidence, especially with young trees planted the previous winter. There appears to be no follow up plan for newly planted street trees and very little arboricultural work in the future years.

And yet, as private properties diminish in size, no longer large enough to sustain large specimen trees, the importance of street trees to provide 'lungs' for the city increases rapidly. The need is for greater consideration given to what tree species will thrive in the often difficult site of street berms and then a follow up programme for these trees after initial careful planting. Very simply, the street trees should be seen as an asset for the city.

In the suburb near my home, Western Springs, Westmere and Sandringham are examples of what I consider as potentially the most successful street tree for Auckland. These trees are thriving in a range of soil types, open to strong winds and in both narrow and broad berms. The species is *Alectryon grandis*, the Three King's titoki.

Found growing naturally on the Three King's Islands, this tree is not as tall as the titoki, with a more compact form and larger almost tropical leaves. I am not sure if the specimens I know so well were deliberately planted as Three King's titokis, or whether they were simply confused with the ordinary on shore titoki. They are often mislabelled in nurseries and garden centres. I have observed these plants almost since they were first planted. They have withstood storms, cyclones, droughts, lack of care, but have thrived growing into very attractive street trees. By comparison, the mainland titoki, very commonly planted as street tree throughout Auckland, while it thrives in very good soil, e.g. volcanic Mt. Eden, Epsom, in more typical Auckland clay soils titokis really struggle to form an attractive specimen.

So my selection for the ideal street tree for Auckland is *Alectryon grandis*, the Three King's titoki.

Book Review: *Plant Words – A Book of 250 Curious Words for Plant Lovers* by Joe Richomme and Emma Wayland

by Neville Arbury

As the authors write so descriptively in the introduction to this publication,

"Guided by experts at the Royal Botanical Gardens Kew, this book is a cornucopia of horticultural term. From plants that have changed the course of history, to those that talk to each other. And from trees as old as dinosaurs to gardening in outer space, this intriguing collection will cultivate your curiosity and give you the inside story on plants."

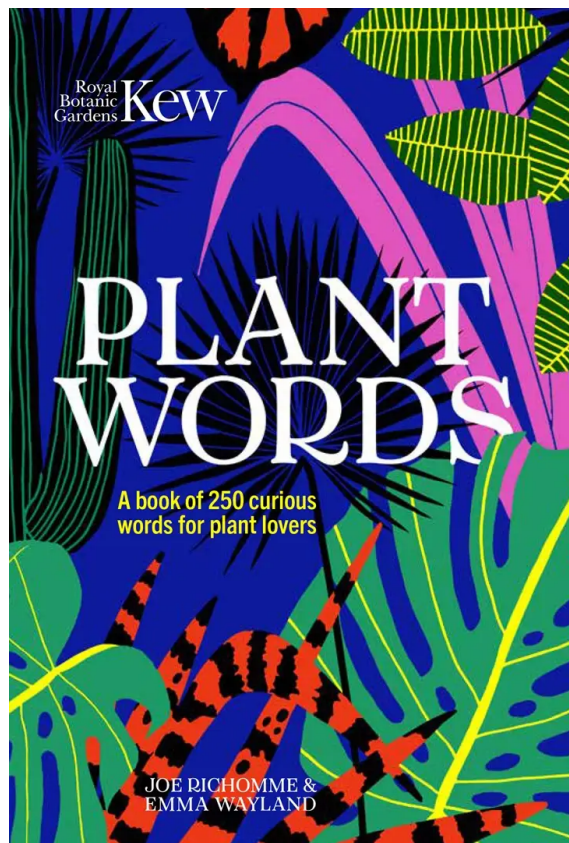
Divided into eight sections, horticultural words/terms are listed alphabetically for ease or researching. The sections are: botany, growing, plant types, history, documentation, environment and ecology, biomes and habitats, science.

Within each section, a particular word or term is explained in quite simple, easy to comprehend English - usually around 120 words. The authors insist that each article merely scrapes the surface of a particular topic, as they write,

"The book is intended above all as the start of a personal journey requiring you to seek out more information about the fascinating organisms upon which we rely so heavily."

There is an abundance of information in the pocket sized publication, both for the beginner gardener and those more experienced. I initially read the book from cover to cover, before returning numerous times to clarify my understanding of some lesser known horticultural terms..

I highly recommend this little gem, giving it my highest rating for horticultural publications.



A Look at One of Our Eminent Botanists, Dr. Lucy Cranwell

by Neville Arbury

Born in Auckland in 1907, she grew up on a small orchard in Henderson, West Auckland. On enrolling at Auckland University in 1925 she initially studied English and botany for her bachelor degree. This was followed by a masters degree in botany. Her thesis was the epiphytes of the Waitakere Ranges, successfully completed in 1929.

Very soon she was offered the position as the inaugural botany curator at the Auckland Museum. She accepted and immediately set about organising the Cheeseman herbarium of over 10,000 specimens.

For fourteen years she worked as the curator, very active years with many field trips around the Auckland region, Northland and Coromandel, adding over 4,000 plants to the herbarium. She also wrote weekly notes about plants for the Auckland Star.

In 1935, while travelling to a conference in Europe, Cranwell became fascinated with an emerging new science, fossil pollen analysis. She felt this would open a whole new field of botany in New Zealand.

Two years later she became a member of the Auckland Botanical Society and in the same year was awarded the Loder Cup, New Zealand's premier conservation award (won by Bill and Muriel Fisher in 1970).

In 1940 she published 'The Botany of Auckland', the first definitive work of flora in the Auckland region. A remarkable work that I refer to from time to time.

Three years later she married an American air force captain and in 1944 moved to Orlando, Florida and then to Boston where she worked as a research associate in the botany department of Harvard University.

In 1950 the family moved to Tucson, Arizona where Cranwell became a research affiliate in palynology at the University of Arizona. She retained this position for the rest of her life and earned international recognition for her work on Gondwana plant micro fossils.

Cranwell often returned to New Zealand and in the 1990s heard about Fernglen and donated \$500.00US to put towards what she termed, "what you see fit". The gazebo near the education building was built with Cranwell's gift, in memory of her colleague and close friend Dr. Lucy Moore.

Numerous species have been named after Lucy Cranwell including *Libertia cranwelliae*, seaweed *Codium cranwelliae*, and lichen *Buellia cranwelliae*.



Fernglen gazebo built with Cranwell's gift in memory of her close friend Dr. Lucy Moore

What is the Loder Cup?

by Neville Arbury

Very simply, the Loder Cup acknowledges outstanding achievements in flora conservation work.

The cup is awarded by the Minister of Conservation, based on recommendations from the Loder Cup committee, to a person or group of people who best represent the objectives of the cup, to celebrate their outstanding conservation work in New Zealand.

The cup is named after Englishman, Gerald Loder, a businessman, politician, botanist and plant collector. He travelled the world extensively and in 1902 purchased Wakehurst Estate where he commenced planting over 3,000 species of trees and shrubs collected from many countries. He was particularly interested in the cultivation of rare species and plants from the southern hemisphere, especially New Zealand. In 1926 he donated the cup to New Zealand after what he described as,



"having for many years taken an interest in the flora of New Zealand and having cultivated as many New Zealand plants as possible at home."

The first award of the Loder Cup was given to the New Plymouth nursery Duncan and Davies for a display of more than 500 well grown native plants, at the Auckland Horticultural society's 1929 Rose Show.

In 1970 our very own Bill and Muriel Fisher were awarded the Loder Cup, part of the citation reads:

"At their 17 acre property in Birkenhead. Mr and Mrs Fisher established a collection of more than 700 native plants including 130 species of ferns and some 200 species of alpiners. Her book, 'Gardening with New Zealand Plants, Trees and Shrubs', is a valuable contribution to horticultural literature and a stimulus to greater use of native flora in home gardens."

A Visit to the Roof Top Native Garden at the Hundertwasser Art Centre in Whangarei

by Neville Arbury

Friedrich Hundertwasser, an Austrian painter, architect ecological activist and visionary made his home in the Bay of Islands after visiting New Zealand a number of times. In 1998 he was invited to design an art gallery for Whangarei and so began the long and often protracted process of establishing what is now the Hundertwasser Art Centre. An integral part of the design was the creation of a large roof top garden, covering 980 square metres. Plantings commenced in 2021 the year before the centre opened. Because of the weight factors a growing medium was designed. A mixture of locally sourced pumice and fine bark. Pathways are permeable and covered with natural materials.

The lung roof managed storm water by absorbing rain water thereby reducing run off. The roof also reduces energy consumption by acting as a thermal barrier, reducing the buildings requirement for insulation.

The plantings are specifically of Northland native trees and shrubs, including those from offshore islands, with emphasis on threatened, endangered and rare species. Notable were a number of *Penanntia baylisiana* specimens, the rarest tree in the world! Plants are arranged randomly allowing self seeding to happen over time.

I was most impressed with the scale of the planting and the overall health of the many plant species. Tracks allowed easy access throughout the entire toof top garden.

Some of the notable plants that caught my eye included:

- *Alectryon grandis*
- *Ackama rosifolia*
- *Elingamita johnsonii*
- *Griselinia lucida*
- *Hebe 'Mokohinau'*
- *Myrsine aquilonia*
- *Penanntia baylisiana*
- *Pomaderris phyllicifolia*
- *Streblus banksii*
- *Xeronema callistemon*

Well worth a visit when passing through Whangarei, or to make a special trip north to view this remarkable building with it's unique roof top garden!

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



Botanical Art at Fernglen

Interested?

contact
Lesley Alexander
021 161 7070 or
email lesley.alexander.smith@gmail.com

Naylor Love

Naylor Love are committed to seeking sustainable construction practices. Their history in New Zealand makes an interesting read on their website:

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