



WELCOME TO OUR
Summer Newsletter

Editorial - Vicki Steven

Spring brought the usual unsettled weather patterns with extremes of heat and cold, including a massive hailstorm on Race Day, followed by 5 weeks of dry weather. Major highlights of the quarter for the Friends have been the biennial conference of volunteer guides in Australasian Botanic Gardens, held this year in Adelaide. Three of our guides attended this conference and Susan Lawrence has written about the highlights on page 9.

The major renovations to the Cuninghame House have continued with the installation of new underground heating & irrigation pipes. The conservatory will remain closed until the middle of 2026.

Finally the highlight of December was the much anticipated flowering of one of our 4 *Amorphophallus titanum*s. More about this amazing flower on P7. Due to lack of space in the nursery, the plant was relocated to the Ilex Function Room on Monday 15th, and opened up for public viewing with very attractive staging by the Conservatories team. Social media engendered immediate attention and when it finally flowered on Friday night the news spread rapidly and a queue reached the Armagh St Car Park around 3pm on Saturday. A feature of the viewing was the close co-operation between the Gardens' staff, the Visitor Experience team and the Friends who volunteered for crowd control and answering questions. The level of interest was almost unprecedented.

If you have friends visiting Christchurch this summer, don't forget our free daily guided walks at 1:30pm from the Kiosk. There are different themes every day and details can be found on our website, www.friendsofthechchgardens.co.nz

Congratulations to Our Apprentices

Congratulations to Reece Chaiklen, Nigel Crook, Azariah Toonen and Serena Gobbo who have all completed Level 3 and Level 4 in Amenity Horticulture here at the Botanic Gardens. Reece is now employed at Queens Gardens in Invercargill. Nigel is currently working with Luke Martin on a special project in the Native Section. Azariah Toonen is working with the Operations Team and Serena Gobbo is considering her options. Congratulations also to Oliver Cheyne who in the New Year will be starting his 3-year apprenticeship at the Botanic Gardens.

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Director's Report

Thank you for your patience recently in the Gardens while we have been extending our irrigation main. The river walk path between the West Bridge and the native gardens has been closed to add a section of main. This will enable us to water in this area when we need to.

Apologies too for the noise around Cuningham House. The team of contractors has been clearing the metal work and that has been noisy. They are making good progress with the work. The first new metal frames have been installed and the first base coat of paint is being applied to the lower windows in the lower head height section.

The new turf in the first quarter of the central rose garden has established well and the irrigation is working a lot better. We look forward to doing the other quarters this coming winter.

As I write this newsletter the next *Amorphophallus titanum* is developing its flower. Such an exciting time and I sorry to say that I will miss it due to traveling to see family. The flower has been growing about 8 to 10 cm per day recently and we hope it will not grow so big that we cant get it through the door. So exciting and I hope that many of you will be able to see it on display.

The cacti collection is having a revamp!

The process has begun to reinvigorate the cacti collection which has been shown to the public in Garrick House since the late 1950's. We have begun sourcing new plants from local nurseries and will eventually be growing new specimens from seed from overseas suppliers to increase the diversity of the collection.

Many of our original cacti have lost vigour over a number of years and refuse to initiate flowering. This can make propagation from seed nearly impossible and also, many do not produce sideshoots nor are they able to be divided easily. Once enough stock has been sourced, these will be added to the displayed collection which will be due for repotting in early spring.

I would like to thank each and every one of you for your support as Friends of the Gardens. Besides the many things you support either with funding or volunteer work or both, are the apprentices. Thanks to your help and two bequests, we have been able to have an additional apprentice being trained at the gardens. These are the next generation of horticulturalists to care for and develop our gardens and plant collections.

Thank you so much for your continued support.

Wolfgang Bopp
Director





President's Report

Greetings. By the time this is published the busy pre-Christmas season will be over and I hope that at least some of you are enjoying a well-earned rest. The Friends celebrated the season with a very well attended Christmas function at the Kiosk. As well as drinks, and nibbles provided by the committee, we were treated to a well-illustrated and informative talk from Director Wolfgang Bopp on the restoration of the Cuninghame House conservatory. It is anticipated that by this time next year the conservatory will be open to the public again. Volunteers joined with gardens staff for a lunch in mid-December.

In October I was fortunate to be able to attend the 18th Australasian Botanic Garden Guide conference in Adelaide, along with fellow guides Susan Lawrence and Vicki Steven. A report on this will be included in the newsletter.

After a wet spring a series of very hot dry nor'westers are having an impact. Christchurch was lucky to escape the devastation wrecked by the storm in October. Despite some severe damage the gardeners of Hurunui showed their mettle in readying things for their garden festival a mere few days later. A public garden to experience severe damage was Queens Park in Invercargill, a 5-star Garden of National significance. Work to clear serious tree fall there is ongoing.

In our own Botanic Gardens, the formal rose beds are in full bloom with the adjacent dahlia beds still to come. The herbaceous borders are approaching their summer peak and the hydrangeas beginning to flower.

A big event for the gardens was the flowering of a Titan arum, *Amorphophallus titanum*, commonly known as the Corpse Flower. As I write, in mid-December, this is underway, with the unfurled spathe and tall green spadix on display in the events centre. Even without the spectacular colouring (and odour!) yet to come this is looking wonderful. A detailed article about this amazing plant can be found on our website:

<https://friendschchbotanicgardens.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/newsletter-119-autumn-2020.pdf>

In early October, during Heritage Week, an event was held to celebrate 25 years since the establishment of the Curator's House garden. This was designed by Christchurch City Council landscape architect Dennis Preston to demonstrate techniques to best utilise a small productive garden space. Under the care of curator Louise Young since inception, this is a constantly changing space which is well worth a visit. Perhaps followed by a coffee or cold drink at the adjacent Curator's House Restaurant which uses the produce from the garden.



The Titan Arum in full flower on December 20th 2025



President's Report continued

I hope some of you took up the opportunity to take a guided walk and/or visit the Albert Edward oak near the woodland bridge. This was planted in 1859 by Enoch Barker, the first government gardener to commemorate the marriage of Queen Victoria's eldest son.

Did you know that the Gardens have a semi-wild population of a very rare plant? *Leptinella nana*, the pygmy button daisy is not easy to find, but this tiny gem can be seen on the edges of gravel paths in the Cockayne garden, and has spread into the native section. A local reference is as follows:

<https://www.thepress.co.nz/environment/350353377/tiny-native-one-rarest-plants-world-grows-christchurch>

A New Zealand natives guided walk would be one way to see this.

Wishing you all the best for the festive season,

Margaret Metherell
President



Apprentices' Field Trip to Banks Peninsula

Spring was in full swing and it was time for an apprentice field trip to stretch our legs outside of the Botanic Gardens. With the morning sun dancing on the harbour, we wound our way around to Ohinetahi, just out of Governors Bay. Lizzy, former curator of the Heritage Rose Garden, was waiting to take us on the tour of our first stop of the trip, Ohinetahi Gardens.

The property was purchased by botanist Thomas H Potts in 1858. He extended the land from the ridgeline, down the valley, and including Quail Island. Potts began the development of the garden and expanded on the existing dwellings, building the sandstone house that remains. This 19th century homestead stands proud looking out to the heads, even with its third floor missing post quake. Although the garden fell into disrepair, many of the specimen trees planted by Potts remained. The property, now 1.25 hectares, was purchased by architect Sir Miles Warren in 1976. Inspired by a trip around Britain's most renowned gardens, the grounds once again took priority.



Apprentices at the Giant's House in Akaroa



Apprentices' Field Trip continued

A formal lawn encased in stone walls, herbaceous borders either side of a brick pathway with a gazebo at the end, and a corridor lined with pleached *Carpinus betulus* was only the beginning of the tour. Climbing up a winding staircase to pop out the top of a tower, gave a new viewpoint down to the well-maintained buxus hedges that zig zag their way around the red garden. Sir Warren's architectural eye is evident in the flow and balance of the garden. Much like in his building designs, there is a sense of space condensing with narrow entranceways, through to the expansion of enclosed garden spaces. The sculptures blend seamlessly with the garden and a large hedged kanuka "mattress" is arguably just as structurally intriguing as some of the art pieces!

Up and over Gebbies Pass, with a quick stop at the Tai Tapu general store, we made our way to Otahuna Lodge. Much like Ohinetahi, the historic building and rich settlement history adds to the importance of this location. The balance of functional to fairytale, and the contrast of manicured striped lawns to wild woodlands provides something for everyone lucky enough to be a guest at the lodge.

The potager garden wrapped in stone walls is frequented by the chefs for seasonal produce. One chef was spotted picking courgette flowers to stuff with goat's cheese and fry for a vegetarian guest. As we munched on fresh white asparagus, Steve, the head gardener, talked us through rotating their crops, composting their green waste and using manure from the farm animals on the gardens, keeping as much on the property as possible. The grounds offer seasonal interest with daffodil fields (an annual public attraction) and the winding pathways encourage curiosity to explore the self contained garden "rooms" offering privacy for guests to roam or a garden wedding to take place.

A longer drive for day two, past Hinewai on south eastern Banks Peninsula ("The Wild Side"), at the end of the gravel road we arrived at Fishermans Bay, a private garden owned by Jill and Richard Simpson, terraced into the harsh landscape on their property which is predominantly a working farm. Jill's passion for blending native plants with exotic perennials provides an extended season of interest with an evergreen backdrop, and if you listen carefully, a Tui can be heard perched above, enjoying the regenerative work that has been done. Adapting their gardening methods based on the restrictions and limitations of the rigorous coastal environment, no green waste is lugged up the steep hills, instead a "chop and drop" method is used. Water run off and poor drainage being an issue with higher rainfall and clay soils, they have developed a unique drainage system to avoid slips and damage to the garden. The goal being a garden that requires little intervention. Fencing off areas to keep grazing animals out, planting natives and actively trapping pests it feels like no stone has been left unturned in the design of this garden.

A trip to the peninsula wouldn't be complete without stopping in at the Giant's House. Built in 1880 for the first BNZ Bank Manager out of totara and kauri, the grand, two storey villa painted white with multicoloured accents stands proud on its hill. Owned by artist and horticulturalist Josie Martin, this sculpture garden is one you have to see in person to fully grasp the scale of these artworks. The considered placement of plants draws your eye to the colours of the mosaics which have a clever use of white for balance. Mosaic walls and steps sit comfortably nestled into the hill, guiding you through a series of interactive sculptures. The joy and imagination this garden provided was the cherry on top of our trip.

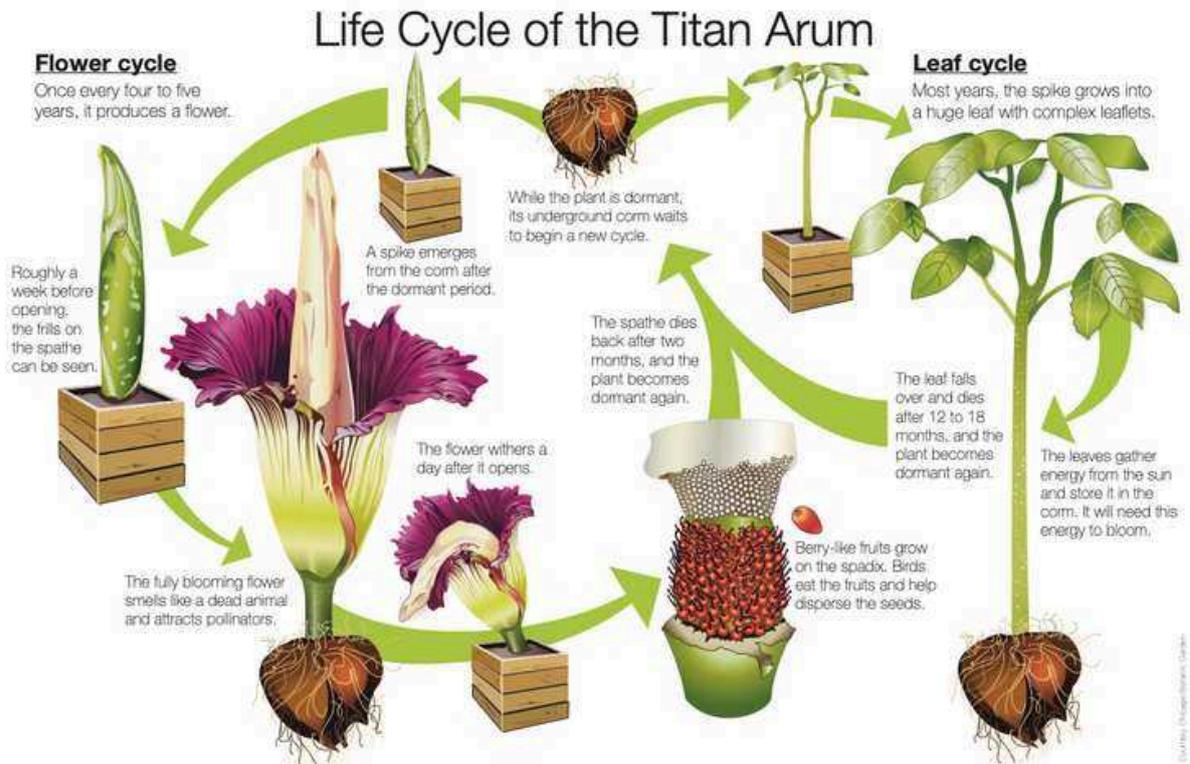
Thank you to the Friends of the Botanic Gardens for making this trip possible. The conversations on the van ride home were full of excitement and inspiration from our trip and we look forward to putting new energy and ideas back into the Botanic Gardens.

- **Allanah Kwant** - Christchurch Botanic Gardens staff



Amorphophallus titanum Life Cycle

Due to the great interest in the flowering of the Titan Arum last month we are re-printing the life cycle diagram, kindly supplied by the Chicago Botanic Gardens:



Staff Profile - Grant Matheson

One of the CBG's well-known PGMOs (Parks & Gardens Maintenance Officers) is about to retire. Grant Matheson spent his early years working in the family nursery business in Dunedin, before undertaking an apprenticeship at Dunedin Botanic Gardens. Later, Grant gained experience in England, France & Belgium before spending 30 years working in commercial horticulture with a seed company. Grant has spent the past almost 8 years working in the Alpine & Rock Garden and has achieved a great deal with regard to the plant collections and the establishment of the two crevice gardens. His favourite plants include the saxifrages and the South African bulbs such as Gladioli & Ixias. The high standard of maintenance in this area is a testament to Grant's attention to detail.

Regular visitors to the Alpine Garden will have noticed a small collection of hypertufa pots. These contain collections of Narcissi which can be dug up & divided without becoming mixed up

When pressed to name his least favourite garden task, Grant didn't hesitate to name scrubbing the water fountain as the most unpleasant task he regularly performs.

Grant will be missed.

Vicki Steven - Editor





He Puāwai: A Natural History of New Zealand Flowers

Canterbury Botanical Society's last meeting of the year was something very impressive. Philip Garnock - Jones is an eminent botanist and Emeritus Professor of Botany at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University. He has just published a beautiful book called "He Puāwai: A Natural History of New Zealand Flowers". His first public lecture since publication was at the 'Bot Soc' pre-Christmas meeting and attracted a large audience.

Audience members were provided with 3D glasses and there is a similar viewer inside the book. This provides a stereoscopic view of 100 native flowers he has chosen to include from the 2,200 species native to Aotearoa. The images are also magnified, allowing the viewer appreciate the detail and beauty of even the tiniest flower.

In an interview with New Zealand Booklovers, he explains his motivation: 'My aim was to show all the different flower phenomena we find in Aotearoa

– illustrating different sexes, shapes, colours, changes through time, adaptations to animal-, wind- and water-pollination, and separation and movement of parts – and to photograph the flowers in all their variety with a botanist's eye.'

Plants produce flowers solely for reproduction but a pollinator is needed to deliver the pollen to the female part of the flower. The most complex relationships between flower and pollinator involve animals. We were shown inside different flowers, with magnified images capturing the diverse ways flowers have evolved to entice insect visitors. The accompanying text presents the most up to date knowledge in a very readable way. The flowers of New Zealand sometimes are described as mostly 'small and simple' in comparison with those from the tropics.

Philip Garnock - Jones' talk and book demonstrated that small definitely doesn't mean simple and it most definitely does mean beautiful.

-Laura Jones, Garden Volunteer

He Puāwai: A Natural History of New Zealand Flowers

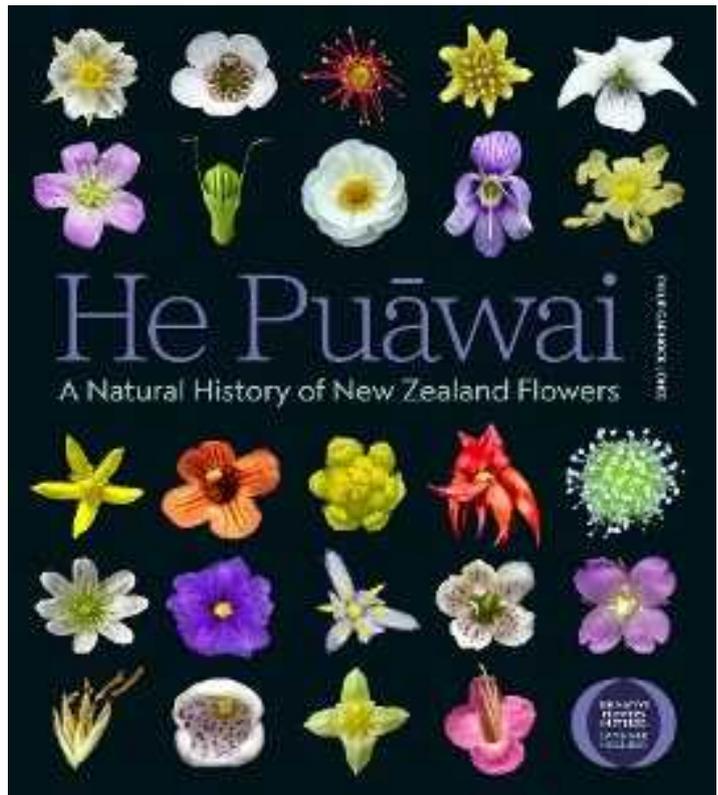
Philip Garnock-Jones

Published: Auckland University Press, 2025.

ISBN: 9781776711680

Available online from AUP (<https://aucklanduniversitypress.co.nz/he-puawai/>)

Also available at the CBG Visitor Centre. RRP \$79.99



Kūmara/ Sweet Potato/ *Ipomea batatas* – continued from Newsletter #141

Origin:

Ipomea batatas probably evolved in the tropical part of South America, around the Caribbean Coast where many *Ipomea* species are found. Scientists in the Dept of Biology, at Oxford University have made an extensive genetic study of *I. batatas* and its CWR (crop wild relatives). The science is complex but the findings suggest *I. batatas* arose as a wild hybrid about 800,000 years ago.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S096098221830321X>

Humans reached S. America about 15,000 years ago. They soon realised the value of this plant and carried it with them into new areas like Peru and Brazil, so its cultivation spread. Since then it has been distributed around the world and has huge economic importance. Many newer cultivars have been bred.

Human cultivation and trade means today's varieties being grown on different Pacific Islands are not the same as those that would have been present when Solander went plant-hunting in Eastern Polynesia 250 years ago. Consequently, there was no point in the Oxford team comparing the genetics of today's kūmara with their South American relatives, to see how close was their similarity.

However, they could use material from the Banks/ Solander dried samples. Doing this, they saw that there had been significant genetic divergence between early S. American samples and the Pacific one. The calculation is that this divergence occurred about 100,000 years ago.

Given human settlement of Polynesia was within the last 1000 years approximately, the Sweet Potato had to have arrived in the Pacific a very long time before humans. It is known that seeds from other *Ipomea* species have travelled long distances across the ocean – could not *I. batatas* have done the same?

Their conclusion ...

'In summary, our data strongly suggest that the presence of the sweet potato in Polynesia predates human colonization of the region by thousands of years and consequently is most probably due to long-distance dispersal, which we have shown is a relatively common occurrence within the genus *Ipomoea*.'

However, other experts believe the jury is still out on whether there was pre-Columbian contact between Pacific and S. American peoples.

Some of the strongest evidence is the linguistic similarities between the 2 areas e.g. Kumara, is very similar to the Ecuadorean Quechua word, 'kumar'.

It has also been suggested that reliance on a 250 year old herbarium specimen is open to question, as DNA degrades.

This is summarised in a statement from researchers at Otago University's Anatomy Department, Professor Lisa Matisoo-Smith and Dr Michael Knapp:

*" ... the finding that *I. batatas* evolved from the wild *Ipomea trifida* ...is an important finding, as it has implications for food security and the ability to look to appropriate wild sources from which to introduce new genetic variation into this important food crop."*

However:

"We would like to see more robust data, ideally from multiple sources, presented before we can accept the data and reconsider the current interpretation that the sweet potato was brought to Polynesia by humans at some point around 1000-1200 AD."

<https://www.sciencemediacentre.co.nz/2018/04/13/when-did-sweet-potatoes-arrive-in-the-pacific-expert-reaction>

As a Gardens' Guide, this debate often 'crops' up when visitors ask about a possible connection across the Pacific.

There are people who read the Newsletter who will know a great deal more than that is covered above. I would be very appreciative of other information and ideas via the Editor.

-Laura Jones, Garden Volunteer



Australiasian Botanic Gardens Guides' Conference, Adelaide October 2025

Three of our Guides attended this conference, Margaret Metherell, Vicki Steven and Susan Lawrence.

It was the 18th biennial conference with 145 delegates from 14 Botanic Gardens, including a couple from Wellington. It was a four-day programme with a mix of plenary sessions, guided walks in the Adelaide Botanic Gardens, visits to Mt Lofty Botanic Garden and Wittunga Botanic Garden in the Adelaide Hills and a selection of day excursions. A highlight was a reception at Government House and a tour of the gardens. The Governor is Patron of the Friends group.

Adelaide Botanic Gardens were opened in 1957 on 51 hectares located on the unceded lands of the Kaurna people. Adjacent to the Gardens is Botanic Park which occupies 34 hectares showcasing many important native and exotic trees. Mt Lofty B.G. was opened in 1977, a botanic garden of hills and gullies on the eastern slopes of Mt Lofty. Wittunga was opened in 1975.

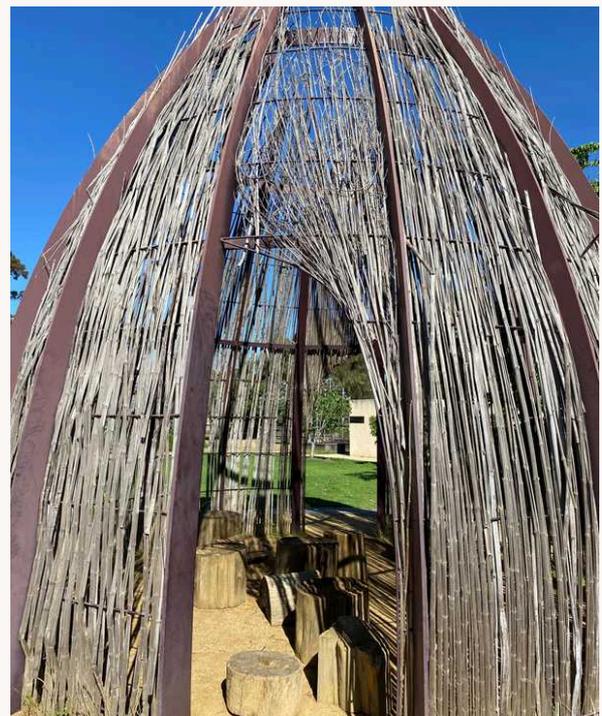
Adelaide Botanic Gardens boasts a number of features. The magnificent Palm House is one of the last 19th century European-style glasshouses remaining in the world. Prefabricated in Bremen, Germany, the Palm House was shipped flat-packed to Port Adelaide in 1875, opened in 1877 and restored in 1995. The Greek Revival Museum of Economic Botany is an impressive building as well with beautiful antique glass cases housing exhibits showing how, across the globe, plants are used for food, fibre, timber, dyes and medicine. More recent additions include the Amazon waterlily pavilion which opened in 2007, and the Bicentennial Conservatory (nicknamed the Cornish pastie because of its unusual shape) which opened in 1989.

Christchurch hosted this conference in 2013. At that conference, Neil Fleming donated an antique bell which has since been passed on to host cities with the names engraved in the process. It has become a special part of the handing over ceremony. Hobart, Tasmania will host the 2027 conference.

Susan Lawrence, Guide Co-ordinator



Amazon Water Lily Pond



An artwork in the form of an indigenous shelter



Delegates in their uniforms



Pseudopanax ferox – Alan Joliffe

Pseudopanax ferox, commonly known as fierce lancewood or toothed lancewood, is a distinctive evergreen endemic tree.

It is renowned for its striking and unusual juvenile form of a straight fluted trunk with its downward pointing, very tough irregular coarsely toothed leaves which are beautifully marbled and mottled. The colouring and mottling can vary in colour and form. The leaves are shorter, stronger, and darker than the more common lancewood, *Pseudopanax crassifolius*.

The juvenile stage gives way to the adult stage after about 10 years, but it can be up to 20 years although I have recently observed cultivated tree's branching in less than 10 years. This phenomenon is known as heterophylly where the juvenile form is distinctly different to the adult form. It is thought this is an adaption to protect the fruiting form from browsing Moa.

The adult form is a small, up to 8m high, round headed tree. The single adult trunk is deeply grooved and ridged with fawn bark often mottled grey/white, has branched out at the top and formed adult leaves. The leaves are distinctly different from the juvenile stage. Adult leaves are shorter, leathery and a deep green or chocolate brown colour. Leaves are long narrow with a few teeth on the margin towards the rounded tip.

Flowers are formed on rounded umbel. Perfect hermaphroditic flowers occur on secondary umbels that are 2-5-flowered. Purple fruit is 8-9 mm diameter. A nice small tree up to 8 m tall.

It is gynodioecious. Gynodioecy is a rare breeding system that is found in certain flowering plant species in which female plants and hermaphroditic plants (with perfect flowers) coexist within a population. This is the same as *Fuchsia excorticata*.

It is found in the North and South Islands. In the North, its distribution is patchy and it is known from Ahipara, Woodhill Forest (South Kaipara), the Moawhango and southern Rimutaka Range. In the South Island, it is more widespread generally easterly from the Marlborough Sounds to Southland in a variety of habitats.

Naturally occurring on Banks Peninsula there are plenty of examples to see in the wild. In the urban landscape there are also many examples. University of Canterbury grounds have some unusual plantings while the tiny native area at Avebury Park/ Richmond Community Garden host some lovely old mature trees of *Pseudopanax ferox*.

Fierce Lancewood is an architectural and ornamental plant in gardens, both in New Zealand and internationally. Its stark, prehistoric appearance makes it a fantastic focal point.

As noted above it is an interesting plant with two distinct botanical novelties. Heterophylly, with two distinct foliage forms and Gynodioecy with two distinct flowering options.

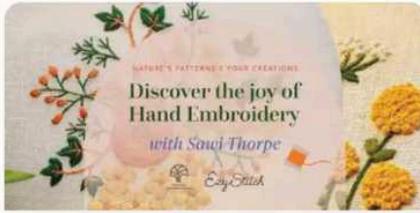


Our Next Meeting:

On Sunday 15th February at 4pm in the Kiosk, our speaker will be Peter Langlands, a prominent New Zealand forager, conservation scientist, and "accidental botanist" based in Ōtautahi Christchurch.

Peter will speak about foraging and urban ecology.

We look forward to seeing you there



Mon, 29 Jun 2026, 6pm - 9pm NZST
Botanical Embroidery

An inspiring 3-hour workshop exploring the timeless craft of hand embroidery with Sawi Thorpe from Tāmaki Makaurau.

\$105 (\$135 Non-Members)



Sat, 6 Dec, 10:30am 2025 - Fri, 1...
Tea in My Garden

Explore four unique Canterbury gardens, meet the gardeners, and enjoy a guided tour through their beautiful grounds.

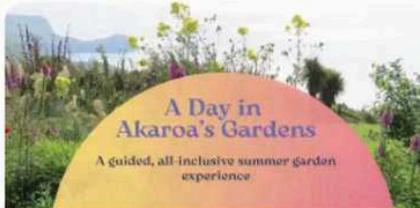
From **\$35pp**



Wed, 21 Jan 2026, 6:30pm - 9p...
Mediterranean Inspired Sunny...

Soft colours, hardy perennials and Mediterranean vibes. Includes tube plants & seeds to take home.

\$129 (\$169 Non-Members)



Wed, 28 Jan 2026, 8:30am - 5p...
A Day in Akaroa's Gardens

All inclusive Garden Tour of four stunning gardens in Banks Peninsula.

\$245 (\$285 Non-Members)



Thu, 12 Feb 2026, 6:30pm - 8:30...
Botanical Photography

Learn to capture the delicate beauty of your favourite plants and flowers.

\$65 (\$85 Non-Members)



Tue, 17 Feb, 6:30pm - Sun, 29 Ma...
Garden Design

Learn to design with confidence and creativity – practical skills for a beautiful, functional garden in this **7-week course**.

\$590 (\$655 with a CHS Membership)



Sun, 22 Feb 2026, 2pm -... + 1 date
Green Man Tile

Create a Green Man tile in this hands-on ceramic workshop. Shape foliage and features in clay, exploring nature symbolism.

\$85 (\$105 Non-Members)



Sun, 15 Mar 2026, 12pm... + 3 dates
Pressed Flower Workshops

Join artist Debz Eagle for workshops in flower pressing and botanical art.

\$85 (\$115 Non-Members)



Thu, 26 Mar 2026, 6:30pm - 8:3...
Ikebana Workshop

Includes a hand-crafted ceramic dish by local potter Jane McCulla, a professional-grade kenzan and flowers & foliage.

\$185 (\$225 Non-Members)



Unless noted our workshops are held in The Kiosk, just over the footbridge from the Armagh Street carpark in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens.

Scan the QR code to access our events on Humantix or head over to CHS website: www.chsgardens.co.nz for more information.



Friends' Contact Details

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