



WELCOME TO OUR
Autumn Newsletter

Editor - Vicki Steven

Isn't it strange how the weather plays such a big part in our conversations if we are gardeners, garden lovers or just outdoor-loving Kiwi? If you think the summer was a wash-out you'd be right. According to MetService, the total rainfall for Christchurch between December and February was 227.2mm compared with the historical average of 115.5mm. Many of us will remember that very wet day back on February 16th, when surprisingly the Airport only recorded 37.8mm but the Botanic Gardens recorded

59.2mm (9am to 9am), according to Breanna Hill, who takes the measurements daily.

However out on Banks Peninsula there were reports of rain gauges overflowing above 400mm. Climate change is rearing its head.

Meanwhile Autumn has arrived with lovely still days and rapidly changing colours. My favourite trees in the gardens are the maples, What are yours? Do come and explore our beautiful Gardens before the leaves are gone.

In the next two months our trained Guides are involved with additional guiding activities. From 28 March to 19 April we have the Christchurch Walking Festival with 14 free 90 minutes general interest walks starting from the Kiosk. Online bookings are required.

From 2 -3 May, Mona Vale will be part of Open Christchurch. See page 6 for more information.



Contents

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| P1. Editorial | P7. Cass Alpine Plant Course - Mark Stagg |
| P2. Director's Report | P8. Underground Festival |
| P3. President's Report | P9. Thank you to Carolyn Dixon |
| P4. Snippets from Mona Vale | P10. <i>Sophora microphylla</i> - Alan Joffiffe |
| P5. Paintbrush lilies | P11. CHS Programme |
| P6. Coming Events | P12. Friends' Contacts |



Director's Report

Dear Friends of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens, I am writing this as Janet and I are leaving Sydney after a short break. It is a fascinating city with its history of the First Nations, early settlers and the modernity of the cityscape today, dwarfing St Mary's Cathedral, which, one assumes, would have originally towered over all the other buildings, maybe rivalled by the tallest eucalyptus trees.

As we enter autumn, I was fascinated to see the maple collection at Royal Sydney Botanic Gardens. Will they colour up anywhere near as well as they do with us? I shall have to ask a colleague to send me some images when they do start to turn. In our few days we had night temperatures around 18!

Next time you visit, please have a look at the NZ Section. We are so pleased to have installed new paths in the Icon Garden so that anybody with a pram, buggy or wheelchair, has an alternative to the steps. Steps are a great spatial feature, often used in garden, landscape and house design but they make it harder for some of us. We have also added a deck overlooking the lake to invite you to spend more time in this tranquil place.

The other place not to miss are the dahlia beds, still full of colour; plus the tree dahlias are coming into bloom at the end of the growing season.

I would like to thank all of you for your continued support of the Gardens. By being a member you help with your membership but you are also

our greatest ambassadors which is fantastic. Please carry on telling your friends and families about our wonderful Botanic Gardens. Anybody that comes to stay with you will hopefully also visit the Gardens. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

With my best wishes, and happy gardening.

-Wolfgang Bopp, Director, CBG



NZ Section from the new viewing deck.



One of the new paths





President's Report

Dear Friends, what a summer this has been, with continuing weather challenges. The climate experts indicate that the La Niña is waning but its impact over recent months, combined with the undeniable (if only!) fact of Climate Change, has been huge. For those affected, our hearts go out. We hope that you get the support you need and that out of those damaged gardens something fresh and beautiful arises.

In that context it seems difficult to talk about my perhaps not so climate-friendly trip to the sub-Antarctic Islands in the first two weeks of January. But it was a long-held goal and a truly wonderful experience. We were so lucky to experience a massive flowering season of the megaherbs which are showing great recovery in those islands where successful pest eradication has taken place. We were also lucky to be joined on board by Peter Garden, chief helicopter pilot for the Campbell Island pest eradication programme. He gave two presentations on board describing his work, and it was an experience for him to see the results of his work many years later

One botanical curiosity was the existence of a naturally occurring hybrid between the two species of *Pleurophyllum*. The hybrid has the growth habit and the large 'landing pad' of the *P. criniferum* flower, with the floret ray of *P. speciosum* in a darker purple colour.

Closer to home, thank you to those of you who have taken part in the successful Monday morning dead-heading work groups in the formal Rose Garden. You may have noticed some of the regular volunteers working around the Gardens in their new T-shirts. I have found mine helpful when answering visitors' questions as they pass through the Curator's House garden.



Pleurophyllum criniferum



Pleurophyllum hybridisation

Summer Shakespeare productions came to both the Archery Lawn and Mona Vale and were well attended, despite some weather-related challenges. At Mona Vale the Sheilah Winn gazebo roof, which was damaged in an unsuccessful copper theft, has been repaired.



President's Report continued

Finally, we are saying farewell to Gardens' staff member Grant Matheson. Many of you will have interacted with him in the Rock and Alpine Garden as he was always so willing to share his knowledge.

I wonder how many of you went to look for *Leptinella nana*? And have you ever wondered what the two trees planted in the middle of the Water Garden lake are? Take a look at them and find out more in the Winter newsletter.

Until then,
Margaret Metherell
President



Leptinella nana in the Cockayne Garden



Snippets from Mona Vale



Lagerstroemia indica - Crape Myrtle

Despite the varied weather we have been experiencing, Mona Vale does not fail to delight. It is interesting to note that visitors participating in guided walks, on the second and last Saturdays of each month, are mainly Christchurch locals who are often familiar with the garden but come to hear about the history. This includes the story of the historic buildings and how Mona Vale moved from private ownership to the guardianship of the people of Christchurch. Many are surprised that this public park is under the auspices of the Botanic Gardens.

This year in May, the historic buildings will be featured in 'Open Christchurch' (see Nona's article to find out more about this popular event).

The Friends' sub-committee have been busy helping to prepare labels for the significant trees at Mona Vale. Many of the trees need labels and the Friends' Committee have nominated this task as one of their funded projects. The trees had first to be identified then the correct nomenclature and country of origin found. Many thanks to Mary Carnegie who spent many hours on this project.



Snippets from Mona Vale continued

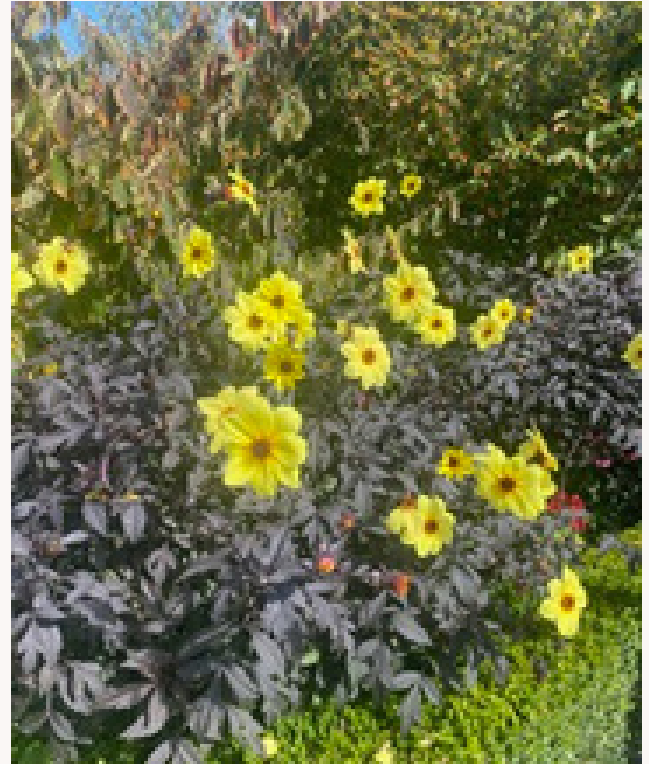
February saw a very successful outdoor production by Top Dog Theatre, of the Merry Wives of Windsor. This was held on the Mound lawn and the audience on their picnic blankets and deck chairs were thoroughly entertained.

Unfortunately, the large Holm Oak tree at the northern end of the lily pond garden had to be removed as it was dying. You may wonder why the trunk has been cut so high. The intention is to have a carving on the top of the trunk, so watch this space.

As you walk around this beautiful garden you will see late summer pops of colour. The south-east corner of the mound lawn by the Sheilah Winn Gazebo is particularly striking with its shades of purple.

Thank you to Ben, Susan, and team, plus the Friends' volunteers, under the directorship of Nicky Brown, who work hard to keep Mona Vale looking at its best.

-Jeanette Christensen



Dahlias with striking contrast



Paintbrush lilies

Two rather unusual members of the lily family have been attracting attention in the palm section this month:

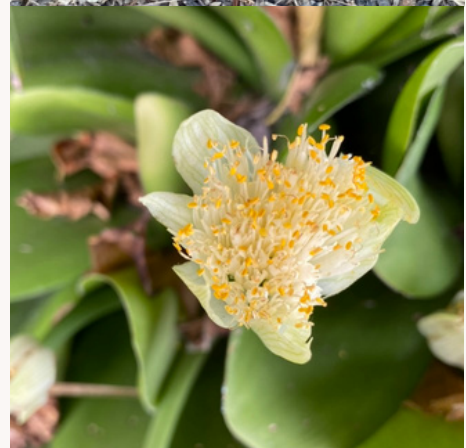
Haemanthus coccineus

Commonly known as the paintbrush or blood lily, this is a member of the *Amaryllis* family. The very striking red flower appears before the leaves in early autumn. The flower reaches 30-35cm and has prominent yellow stamens. You'll find this quite easily in the palm bed in front of the Townend House. I keep mine in very neglected pots and its flowering always takes me by surprise. People have been known to throw their pots away thinking the plant was dead.

Haemanthus albiflos

This is also known as the white paintbrush lily and is a rewarding low-maintenance plant for outdoor pots or in the garden. It benefits from drying out between waterings and from bulb fertilizer in spring & summer. Unlike the blood lily, it retains its fleshy leaves all year round. These can be found on the river side of the palm section.

-Vicki Steven





Upcoming Events

Sunday 19th April at 4pm

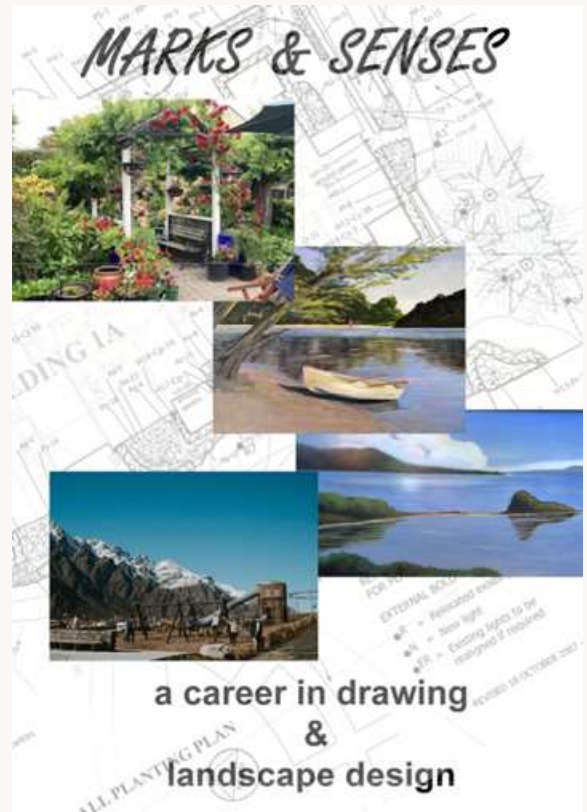
"Marks and Senses", a career in drawing and landscape design
Ray McTeigue, landscape architect

Friday 15th May at 10.30am

"Flora and Ecosystems Conservation in Canterbury"
Richard Clayton, ecologist, Department of Conservation - Te Papa Atawhai

All meetings are held in The Kiosk in the Botanic Gardens, entry via the Armagh St carpark. Join us from 30min beforehand for a cup of tea & a chat.
In Summer we meet on Sundays but from May to September we change to Friday mornings.

Members (including CHS): \$5
Non-members: \$10



Christchurch Walking Festival - Botanic Gardens

The Friends are offering a guided 90-minute General Interest walk at the Botanic Gardens every day of the Walking Festival. They will leave from outside the Kiosk (just over the bridge from the Armagh Street Gardens car park). These general interest walks around the whole gardens will be led by our highly trained guides from The Friends of the Botanic Gardens.

Dates: 28 March to 19 April.

Register: <https://events.humanitix.com/walking-festival-2026/tickets>



Open Christchurch - Mona Vale

The Friends, in partnership with Te Putahi Centre for Architecture and City Making, are presenting Mona Vale for the Open Christchurch Festival, 2 - 3 May 2026. The Mona Vale Bathhouse, Homestead and Gatehouse will be open for tours. We are providing hourly tours from 10 am until 2 pm covering information about the heritage architecture, the contributions of various owners, and post-earthquake renovations. Although the tours are free they must be booked through the Open Christchurch website. Tour groups are limited to 20.





Alpine Plant Course at Cass

I was given the opportunity to participate in a University programme, in a field station in Arthurs Pass, called Cass. This was my last opportunity to participate, as I'm in my final year of my apprenticeship.

The reason I applied for the programme was to improve my skills in plant identification, plant families, and plant terminology. This was also an opportunity to learn new native alpine species and explore that unique habitat.

The course was structured in a way that included lab work, field exploration, and lectures. The lab work included drying out specimens for a herbarium, collecting specimens for a reference ready book and practicing identification keys.

The field exploration included trips to a braided riverbed to identify and discover species such as *Epilobium*, *Raoulia*, and rare species of *Veronica*. We also made our way to Otira Valley, where we discovered species such as *Aciphylla*, *Euphrasia*, and *Anaphalioides bellidioides*. We also visited Broken River ski resort in Craigieburn ranges, where we climbed to the top of the scree and discovered species such as *Notothlaspi rostulatum*, *Lobelia roughii*, *Stellaria roughii*, and *Lignocarpa carnosula*.

The lectures included discussions about plant families, such as the difference between *Poaceae* and *Juncaceae* and *Cyperaceae*. Another lecture was instructions on how to hang herbarium specimen.

The Cass field station is set on 1,770 hectares of mountain research land that is used for scientific research. It truly is such a stunning setting, with 360-degree views of mountains - two of which are on university land. I had the option to climb these mountains, but unfortunately, we ran out of time!



Photo by Mark Stag

The course ran for 8 days with very little down time. Any time we were not on a field trip or in a lecture, we were in the lab or out collecting plant material. Before the trip, I was warned about the lack of downtime, however I found myself looking forward to the evenings in the lab practising identification keys. Everyone was very nice and I made plenty of friends. We played Pictionary, drawing the plants which we were learning for a plant ID test, to help our memories.

The final course grade was split between assignments and a final exam. When it was time for the final exam, I was admittedly nervous, as I haven't sat an exam in over 20 years, but the nerves settled. The plant ID test went as well as it could have but I found myself struggling with the keying. I incorrectly answered a question in the keying process, which sent me down the wrong path. Luckily, I did well enough on the coursework and the plant ID to get me an overall grade of B.

I was extremely pleased with this result and took so much away from the course. I cannot recommend it enough for anyone wanting to further their training in horticulture. The depth of learning was intense but left me wanting more.

-Mark Stag, Trainee, CBG



Underground Festival 2026

Every year some of the proceeds from the Friends' fund-raising are offered to the Gardens' staff in the form of grants for travel to & registration for various conferences & events relevant to their position in the Gardens. Recently four trainees attended the Underground Festival to learn about soil.

Underground Festival was a two day event held in February at Greystone Wines, an organic vineyard nestled into Waipara's Omihi Hills. Over thirty speakers came from around the world to share their knowledge with likeminded people around regenerative farming, with a focus on soil and caring for the land. The Friends of the Botanic Gardens granted four apprentices the opportunity to attend. Here they share a piece each about their favourite talk.

One of the talks I enjoyed most at the Underground Festival at Greystone Vineyards was "Introduction to Biochar" with Phil Stevens, a regenerative agriculture consultant and Chair of the Biochar Network New Zealand. Phil explained what biochar is in a very practical way, a charcoal-like material made by heating organic matter with little oxygen, creating a stable carbon that can help improve soil structure, hold nutrients, and support soil life. A key idea from the talk was that biochar works best when it is "charged" first, usually by mixing it with compost or nutrient-rich liquids before adding it to soil. This helps avoid it temporarily locking up nutrients

and instead allows it to act as long-term soil amendment. I found the talk very interesting because it connected waste biomass, soil health, and carbon storage in a simple and practical way that could be relevant to horticulture and garden management.

-Emi Pereyra

Sinking into the landscape and easing into a day full of knowledge and inspiration, the second session I attended was the one that really stuck out to me. The talk hosted by Jessica Hutchings, a kaupapa Māori researcher who lives on Papawhakaritorito food farm, focused on Hua Parakore, a Māori system for growing food. Hua Parakore is a Māori food sovereignty framework, rooted in allowing access and connection between people and the land and how to care for it. It is based on six core kaupapa (principles) that honour the relationship between land, waters, people, and soil. The focus is protecting and enhancing the soil with natural sustainable practices such as composting, building soil microbiology, crop rotation, and encouraging a connection through listening to what the soil needs and what we can do for it. Jessica Hutchings hosted a Māori Television series called Hua Parakore - Rebuilding our Broken Food Systems and in the first episode speaks on this framework being developed to be inclusive "This is kaupapa (principle), this is tīpuna (ancestor) knowledge and this is for everybody, no matter where you are or whatever your journey."



The CBG team enjoying a lunch break at Underground Festival



Steve Erickson talking about compost



This talk has opened a new pathway of learning for me that I am excited to continue researching, reconnecting with Māori practices for our land to move forward in caring for our soil.

- **Alannah Kwant**

The talk I enjoyed the most was the soil detectives. Following an introduction, they displayed a chart with figures (like soil pressure, worms for shovel, colour, etc) against four different sites. We were split into teams and tasked with matching the sites with the samples in the chart. What I found most interesting was the number of worms that are considered optimum for healthy soil was 25 worms. While it's unlikely that we'll use the process of identifying

soil pressure at the Gardens, the process was interesting. The intention is to determine the depth at which the pressure reaches 300kpa. This identifies the depth at which the roots will penetrate the soil. Our team was unable to match any of the samples but still enjoyed the experience. Many of the people in my team were far more experienced than I was, so I didn't feel discouraged. I would recommend this festival for anyone interested in increasing their knowledge in anything soil, garden, or agriculture. The festival also provided ample opportunities to network with other liked minded individuals from a variety of different backgrounds.

- **Mark Stagg**

Thank you so much for the funding you have provided for the trainees to attend the Underground Festival. It was a great learning opportunity for us all. Some of the talks and workshops I attended were incredibly interesting and educational. For example, I went to some really interesting workshops on composting, small scale organic vegetable farming, and soil testing and management.

- **Joel Kingham**



Emi Perayra at Underground



Thank you to Carolyn Dixon

It is with sadness and gratitude that we thank long-time volunteer and Friend of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens member, Carolyn Dixon. After a lifetime of work in the horticultural industry, Carolyn brought her extensive knowledge of plants and nursery work to the FCBG. As the beloved leader of the Wednesday Prop Group and also on the rota for The Kiosk, Carolyn volunteered for FCBG for many years and was always happy to teach best practices to any friend interested. Her prop team miss her leadership, her encyclopedic knowledge of plants and her fascinating tales of horticulture work all over the world. Thank you, Carolyn.

- **Jo Harris on behalf of the Wednesday Propagation Team**



Sophora microphylla (kōwhai) is promiscuous

This tree is well known throughout Canterbury as it is the dominant species of the genus *Sophora* here. It is promiscuous and so are its relations.

Remnant trees of *Sophora microphylla* can be found in various places throughout Canterbury. Close to Christchurch there are individuals and groups growing wild alongside the Waimakariri river. One of the best places to observe these is at The Willows, an area beside the Waimakariri and set aside as a reserve. The Willows is accessed at the end of Thompsons Road, off the Old West Coast Road near West Melton. These trees are old and stunted from being exposed to the elements for many years, and provide a glimpse of a Canterbury plains vegetation almost in its natural state.

When in flower they are quite outstanding especially as they lose almost all their leaves at flowering. Seeing these trees in leaf and flower we can clearly identify it growing in the wild.

It is known to hybridize with other *Sophora* species quite readily. Locally in Canterbury hybrids occur between *S. prostrata* and *S. microphylla* and in the 1970's some were planted in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens (pers com Metcalf). Additionally, hybrids have occurred between *S. microphylla* and *S. longicarinata* in the South Island.



Old *S. microphylla* at The Willows

With the introduction of other species into cultivation, we can expect further hybrids. I note that recently plants of *S. godleyi* are being sold in Christchurch as have plants of *S. fulvida*. Also *S. tetraptera* 'Otari Gnome' has been sold here. It is now properly named as *S. howinsula* from Lord Howe Island.

S. microphylla for some time was assumed to be a conspecific with a species in South America which is now named *S. cassioides*, Chilean Pelu, which has been sold in NZ as *S. microphylla* 'Goldilocks' and these two are known to hybridise readily.

The New Zealand *Sophora* species is a complex issue due to shared morphological features, hybrids between species, differences in juvenile stages of plants based on geography, and morphological features being inconsistent with genetic profiles.

This complex situation with *Sophora* means that there is opportunity to select forms and give them cultivar names. Within each species there appear to be forms that have adapted to various conditions in New Zealand.

Work undertaken by Dennis Hughes of Blue Mountain Nurseries to collect and grow many of these of the species and their adaptive forms may see new cultivars offered on the market.

It can be difficult to clearly apply botanical names with such hybridism occurring.

The common name kōwhai is often used in the nursery trade and by horticulturists and gardeners to quickly describe a tree. Kōwhai is a name that can be used to describe any of the eight currently known species of *Sophora* that are native to New Zealand. *S. microphylla* is sometimes called South Island Kōwhai but this is wrong as it occurs throughout New Zealand.

– Alan Joliffe

Join the CHS at our annual Fundraiser this May

MARGARET WATLING MEMORIAL DEMONSTRATION FUNDRAISER

Bubbles & blooms

Ali HARPER

OPERA SINGERS
LEISA FALCONER & DONNA ALLEY

FLORIST
YVETTE EDWARDS

EDIBLE FLOWER GROWER
MARION SMITH



SATURDAY 2 MAY
ILEX EVENTS CENTRE

BOOK NOW

Enjoy exquisite floral demonstrations, bubbles & canapés with entertainment by Ali Harper & guests — all in support of Orchards in Schools.

Set in the stunning Ilex Event Centre and timed to coincide with the National Chrysanthemum Show, this magical autumn night is a true celebration of blooms in all their glory.

Headlining the evening is multi-award-winning songstress **Ali Harper**, whose powerhouse voice, warmth and storytelling have captivated audiences worldwide. She is joined by opera singers **Leisa Falconer** and **Donna Alley**. Honouring Margaret Watling's legacy, the floral programme features inspiring demonstrations including chrysanthemums with florist **Yvette Edwards** and edible flowers with **Marion Smith**.

Date: Saturday 2 May 6.30pm **Tickets:** \$165pp

Venue: Ilex Events Centre, Christchurch Botanic Gardens

Formal & fabulous dress code - take home a curated gift bag — complete with your very own flower bubble



Bonsai Basics

Saturday 11 April 1-4pm

Spend an afternoon learning the art of bonsai with expert guidance from the Avon Bonsai Society. Includes tree, materials and more.
\$160 (\$200 Non-Members)



Botanical Watercolours

Sunday 12 April 10am-1pm + 2 dates

Explore the exquisite world of botanical watercolour through two unique workshop experiences with artist Kay Duncan.
\$125 (\$145 Non-Members)



Botanical Embroidery

Monday 29 June 6-9pm

Learn foundational techniques, tips for working with colour and texture, and how to create beautiful designs - inspired by nature - by hand.
\$105 (\$135 Non-Members)



Bud Vase Workshop

Sunday 2 August 10-12.30pm

Spend a creative morning with ceramicist Jane McCulla, two weeks later collect your glazed and fired vases.
\$85 (\$105 Non-Members)



Green Man Tile

Sunday 18 October 10am-12.30pm

Create a Green Man tile in this hands-on ceramic workshop. Shape foliage and features in clay, exploring nature symbolism.
\$85 (\$105 Non-Members)



Unless noted our workshops are held in The Kiosk, 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

Friends of the Botanic Gardens are eligible for all CHS Member discounts!

when you make an online booking for a course or workshop remember to select 'CHS Member' as the rate



Friends' Contact Details

COMMITTEE

President	Margaret Metherell	027 459 199
Secretary	Ray McTeigue	027 569 9402
Past President	Jane Cowan-Harris	021 043 5342
Treasurer	Carol Halstead	022 439 4376
Volunteer Coordinator	Rachel Woods	022 049 1788

OTHER CONTACTS

Guides Co-ordinator	Susan Lawrence	021 120 6258
Group Guided Walks	Pat Whitman	(03) 384 3475
Newsletter Editor	Vicki Steven	vicki_steven2005@yahoo.com.au
Membership Enquiries	Ray McTeigue	027 569 9402

email: friendsofthegardens@gmail.com | PO Box: 73036 Orchard Rd Christchurch 8154
Botanic Gardens enquiries: Information Centre (03) 941 7590