Friends of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens

#145 SPRING 2026



WELCOME TO OUR

Spring Newsletter

Editor - Vicki Steven

Isn't spring the most wonderful season in Christchurch. From the daffodils, through magnolias & cherry blossom to the striking colours of the Ilam azaleas, every turn is ablaze with colour. Do you find yourselves thinking of Wordsworth's poetry: "…a host of golden daffodils!"? Crowds have descended on the Botanic Gardens and Hagley Park for family photos with the blossoms.

One of the highlights of September in the Gardens was the "Illuminate" festival which drew large crowds who enjoyed seeing our favourite trees spectacularly lit up and reflected in the water.



At our recent AGM, Margaret Metherell was re-elected President and your committee will continue to present interesting talks and other activities. Free guided walks resumed on 1st October. Details can be found on our website. All walks begin at the Kiosk at 1:30pm daily. Don't forget the visit to Casa Rossa garden on October 18th at 10am. Bookings are essential.

During the upcoming Heritage Week in October the Guides will be offering 2 historically themed walks in the CBG (21st & 24th), starting from the kiosk at 1:30pm and 2 in Mona Vale on the 23rd & 24th, starting at 1:30pm from the Rose Garden. Brochures are available at the Kiosk.

I'd like to finish with an appropriate whakatauki:

Poipoia te kākano; kia puawai

Nurture the seed and it will blossom

- Vicki Steven, Editor

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President's Report

I hope that you have enjoyed some good frosty weather in your garden, as I have, and are now getting prepared for the predicted dry and windy summer. Thank you to those of you who attended our AGM. Due to rising costs an increase of our subscription was approved, to take effect for your next subscription payment.

We recently lost our Events and Volunteer Coordinator to the demands of full-time work. Rachel Woods did a great job in these two roles and we are seeking replacements. If you have any interest and would like to know what these involve, we would be very glad to hear from you. These are both key parts of the activities that we offer to members and we need your support.

A small project has come to fruition and you will now find an updated list of the Botanic Garden's commemorative trees, available to download, on the CCC website https://ccc.govt.nz/parks-and-gardens/christchurch-botanic-gardens/plants-and-gardens/trees-and-open-spaces.



Wollemi Pine in the College Border

We are keen to find new projects to work on with the Garden's team and would be keen to hear about any ideas that our members might have. What do you see as you walk around the Gardens and Mona Vale that the Friends might be able to contribute to?

Of particular interest due to the Friends support of trainees, are two competitions for young gardeners. By the time this newsletter is published the Young Landscaper of the Year competition will have taken place in the Gardens, and in 2027 the gardens will again host the Young Amenity Horticulturalist of the Year.

The Wollemi pines in front of the Visitor Centre are to have some planting around their bases. There is a particularly healthy-looking specimen in the western end of the College border and another to be found near the Armillary Sphere in the Rhododendron border at Mona Vale.

My pick for visiting in the Gardens this spring is the Rock and Crevice Garden under its new curator, Gabor Csontos. Building on the work of his predecessor Grant Matheson and with the assistance of a team of volunteers from the Alpine Garden Society, this promises to look lovely as we go into spring. There are some other crevice gardens appearing in the Gardens. See if you can find another. Also, last spring I found myself fascinated by the new growth and fruiting bodies in the Pinetum, well worth a look, or join a guided walk.

Enjoy your Gardens visits.

Margaret Metherell

President

Snippets from Mona Vale

Mona Vale, like most public gardens, is springing into action. Many of the large trees are still bare. However the Camellias, Japonicas, Forsythia, and Witch Hazels are lending lovely colour to the park.

Even though Mona Vale does not have the 'Botanical status' of the Botanic Gardens, you will find some wonderful botanic gems if you know where to look.

Parrotiopsis jacquemontiana with its unusual cream and yellow flowers is a large spreading shrub growing beside the main drive between the Lodge and the Homestead. It is a single genus from the witch hazel family, native to the western Himalayas, particularly Kashmir. It grows from 1200 to 2800 metres elevation and can reach a height of 6 metres and spread to 4 metres across. The Mona Vale speciman has room to spread and is looking lovely at the moment. I have been told that this shrub is particularly hard to propagate so we are lucky to have such a a healthy speciman at Mona Vale.



Parrotiopsis jacquemontiana



By the time you get this newsletter, there will be a new Maison Rouge garden seat overlooking the Avon on the Mill Lawn. Our thanks to the Victoria League for their generous donation towards the purchase of this stylish bench. The friends matched the $1000.00 donation which allowed an old bench to be replaced.

At long last, three bike stands in a penny farthing style, will be in place by the brick wall entrance from the car park. These stands are half of what was purchased by the Friends for Mona Vale last year. The other three will be installed by the toilet block when the building is renovated early next year.

Very soon you will be able to buy an ice-cream or take-away coffee from a window on the north side of the Mona Vale Homestead. This is to help the restaurant cater for those folk 'passing through' who don't wish to have a sit-down lunch. The Friends will be able to stock their brochures and photo cards there.

As always thank you to those of you who volunteer at Mona Vale to help keep the gardens looking as lovely as they do.

- Jeanette Christensen
  Mona Vale Co-ordinator

Upcoming Events

On Sunday 18th October at 10 am we will be visiting the delightful Casa Rossa garden in West Melton. More details will be given nearer the time but mark your diary now. Cost will be $12 if we have more than 20 people or $15 for a smaller group. Hot water & cups will be provided but this tour is a BYO morning tea picnic.

Do join us as we enjoy spring time with Mel & Chris in their stunning garden.

Bookings are essential: Please text Vicki on 0221304342 & remember to include the number of people coming and your suburb if you need a ride or can offer one.



15 November - Dr Kate Pedley from Canterbury will talk on the Geology & Landscapes of the Canterbury Region and how the Earth Science garden showcases this.

6 December - Friends Annual Christmas Party. Details to follow.

End of an Era–Faye Fleming retires from Guiding

At our monthly meeting in May, the Guides had the opportunity to celebrate Faye's long involvement with the Volunteer Guiding Programme at the Botanic Gardens. This started back in 2003 with the initial training course run by Faye and her late husband Neil in order to recruit Guides for this new programme.



Further training programmes took place in 2012 and 2019. Faye herself took guided walks all through this time right up to 2026 when she decided it was time to retire.

Given the uniqueness of this programme amongst Botanic Gardens in New Zealand, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Faye (and Neil) for what they started and developed. In 2025 eight new Guides were trained, and the programme is well established. Faye has been responsible in recent years for the accreditation of new Guides.

Thank you Faye for your huge contribution. You have left a great legacy.

- **Susan Lawrence** (Guides Coordinator)

Rain, Hail or Shine – Every day at 9

Continuously recording weather data since 1863 (163 years ago), when our Gardens gained its official Botanic title. 9am sharp every day, and yes, there is a special stamp to indicate daylight-savings!

In 2021 electronic sensors were installed in addition to the manual climatological equipment we still use today. This allows us to view figures in real time via computer access, as well as direct data reports to NIWA for the 6 o'clock News.

"What is that little white box?"… "Glad you asked!"… referred to as a Stevenson Screen/Box. This wooden 4-sided box, fashioned of downward-facing slats, allows for ventilation while protecting from the elements. Raised on legs and painted white to reflect additional sun and ground radiation. It was engineered in the 1860's by Thomas Stevenson, which at the time was top-notch technology! Inside are four thermometers: maximum, minimum, dry bulb, and wet bulb. Relative humidity is calculated from the difference between the dry and wet bulb readings. Warmer air can hold more moisture, so the humidity percentage will sit closer to 100%.



BG's Stevenson Screen, faces North

Frost, dew, or snowfall are noted alongside temperature readings at ground level and below the surface. Including grass temperature, plus soil temperatures at 10cm, 20cm, 30cm, and 1m depths. These help us understand how heat moves through the earth across seasons.

Rainfall and evaporation are captured too. A tilting-siphon rain gauge records rainfall intensity and totals, while a traditional rain cylinder provides manual measurements. The "big metal paddling pool" is the evaporation tank, keeping track of how much water is lost to sun and wind each day.

Out of personal interest, I explored NIWA's rainfall archives and came across a notable comparison: June–July 1926 recorded just over 50mm, compared with just over 100mm in June–July 2026. If you're keen to explore these archives yourself, the datasets can be easily downloaded for a range of locations and time periods.

A daily ritual that keeps us tuned in to the Gardens' climate - rain, hail, AND shine.

Location:

- Station Name: Christchurch Gardens
- Latitude / Longitude: -43.531° S, 172.619° E
- Elevation: ~7 meters above sea level
- Network Number (Agent No): H32561

H = North and Central Canterbury, 32 = greater Christchurch area grid, 561 = manual climatological station

Our automated Electronic Weather Station (EWS) number is 4858 too

- **Breanna Hill,**
- Conservatories PGMO, Christchurch Botanic Gardens

All about Trilliums

Spring brings wonderful splashes of colour throughout the gardens. Ever popular cherry blossoms, daffodils and magnolias are out in full show. However, under the trees, in the shady spots, away from the crowds of photo-snapping tourists are the Trilliums! Trilliums are known for being slow to grow, expensive to purchase and rare to collect, but they are amazing plants and treasures worth waiting for.



Trilliums in a woodland setting, Christchurch Botanic Gardens 2025

Trilliums are a genus of plants in the lily order, specifically in the Melanthiaceae family. Most people would be familiar with the giant wakerobin (*Trillium chloropetalum*) and the great white trillium (*T. grandiflorum*). Both are known for their size and stunning colour in spring. They are fairly common in cultivation.

Smaller species are popular due to their ability to be grown in pots. *Pseudotrillium rivale*, a close relation to Trilliums, is also popular. Trilliums are noted as being toxic, as with other members of its family. They are an iconic part of the North American wildflower scene, blooming after melting of the winter snow, colouring up the forest floor.

Trilliums are found over a wide geographic distribution in the Northern Hemisphere, with the greatest diversity found in North America. They are also found through East Asia (including Japan) and into the Himalayas. Interestingly, the same species does not occur in both Asia and North America. North American species present in the east of the continent are not found in the west, and vice versa (F.W. Case, Jr. & R.B Case, 1997, p18). Just over 30 species have been recorded in cultivation in New Zealand. It's worth noting that they do hybridize naturally, and that cultivars have also been bred.

The structure of Trilliums is quite interesting to look at, most people will quickly see that parts of the plants are in 3's. This is true. However, other structures are not quite what they seem...
The 'leaves' of Trilliums are actually bracts. These bracts have the same photosynthetic purpose as leaves. The stem holding the plant up is not actually a true 'stem' but rather a scape or peduncle. Looking under the ground, the plant emerges from a rhizome. This is where all the energy is stored, and where the plant retreats to in the cold of winter. Now to the best part of Trilliums, the flower! As mentioned earlier, flowers can either be sessile or pedicellate. This refers to a small extension of the peduncle located between the flower and the bracts. If the extension is not present, then it is referred to as sessile. The flowers themselves are stunning. They range in color and size, but all have that distinctive look of a Trillium. The petals and sepals are in 3's, as with the carpels and stamens. The flowers are pollinated by insects such as bees and butterflies. The seeds are dispersed by ants, who carry them into underground tunnels and nests, which effectively 'sows' them.



Trillium comes from 'Tres' in Latin, meaning in 3's. Note the three bracts (leaves), three sepals and three petals

Being woodland plants, Trilliums prefer dappled shade but the amount of light differs between species. Generally, the majority of Trilliums like loamy, humusy, rich soils with good drainage. They appreciate a light fertiliser once or twice a year. It is ideal to apply in late winter or early spring before the new season's growth emerges, to avoid burning the foliage. The best time to plant them is in late summer, once the growth is dying down. All in all, Trilliums are certainly a worthy addition to any garden!

- **Matt Beauzenberg**
- Curator, Christchurch Botanic Gardens

From Christchurch to Detroit



In August I had the privilege of travelling to Detroit, Michigan, to attend the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Arborist Conference. My attendance was made possible through the generous support of the Friends of Christchurch Botanic Gardens, and I am very grateful for the opportunity.

There was also a strong Christchurch connection to this year's conference. Christchurch hosted the ISA Conference in 2025, and travelling to Detroit provided an opportunity to reconnect with some of the international delegates who had visited our city the previous year. It was rewarding to continue conversations that began in Christchurch, hear how ideas had been applied in other cities, and strengthen professional connections with colleagues from around the world.

Although the conference focused on arboriculture, many of the topics were highly relevant to the Botanic Gardens. One presentation that particularly caught my attention was *More Mulch, Fewer Problems,* which explored the role mulch plays in supporting healthy soils and successful tree establishment. Researchers are currently undertaking a five-year study investigating the effect of different-sized mulch rings around young trees.

Early results suggest that wider mulch rings can significantly improve tree growth and establishment, with a three-metre diameter ring currently delivering the strongest results.

While the study is still underway, the findings challenge some common landscape management practices and provide useful food for thought.

Another presentation, *Planting for Success*, focused on what happens after a plant leaves the nursery and enters the landscape. It reinforced the importance of good planting practices, including appropriate planting depth, soil preparation, irrigation and ensuring adequate space for root development. For botanic gardens, where many plants have scientific, conservation, educational or historical value, successful establishment is particularly important. The session served as a timely reminder that investing effort during the early stages of planting can have benefits that last for decades.

I was also interested in a presentation exploring how timber from removed urban trees can be repurposed for community use. Rather than viewing removed trees simply as waste, there are opportunities to transform them into furniture, structures and other useful products that continue to provide value long after the tree has been removed.

Beyond the conference sessions, Detroit itself provided an interesting backdrop. The city's visible renewal highlighted the important role that trees, parks and public landscapes can play in creating vibrant and resilient urban environments. Seeing these projects firsthand reinforced the value of investing in green spaces and the positive impact they can have on communities.

The conference provided a valuable opportunity to learn from international colleagues, observe current research and industry trends, and consider how some of these approaches might be applied in a Christchurch context. I thank the Friends of Christchurch Botanic Gardens for supporting my attendance at the conference.

- **Nicky Brown**
- Mona Vale Gardens

Fuchsia 'First Success'

There's a protocol to be followed in nomenclature to help idenify plants by name. However, there's usually a story behind the common name of most garden plants. The name might describe the shape, the colour, a family connection, a milestone or even a person of fame.

Fuchsia 'First Success' is no exception. Bred in the Netherlands in 1985, it's a hybrid fuchsia. A successful first cross between *F. paniculata* and *F. splendens*, it exhibits what botanists call hybrid vigour. In fuchsia breeding, crossing species from different sections can be difficult due to genetic barriers - in this case it's been successful.

Most of the hybrid fuchsias have hanging bell-shaped flowers described by some as ladies earrings or ballerinas. However, First Success produces lots of terminal clusters (panicles) of small, pink, outward-facing flowers.

Its growth habit can be a bit straggly and if grown in a pot it needs to be regularly trimmed. When grown in a garden it can grow up to two metres in height. Its arching stems and veined foliage make it quite a standout plant. There's one flowering in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens so next time you are walking by the fuchsia garden take some time to stop and admire it.

- **Graham Neate**
- Christchurch Fuchsia Grower





Unforgettable Chatham Islands

My wife and I have recently returned from a 5 night guided tour of Chatham Islands (Rēkohu/Wharikauri) and Pitt Island (Rangiauria) conducted by Dr Hamish Campbell, an esteemed academic geologist who has been embracing the Chathams since 1975 (www.chathamislandtours.nz). Our group of twenty delved into the history, culture, geology and ecology with great enthusiasm.

Moriori first settled on Rēkohu about 800 years ago and adopted a distinctive, peaceful society known as 'Nunku's Law' which forbade killing and warfare. Inevitably their wellbeing was impacted by the arrival of the English brig Chatham in 1791, subsequently bringing lethal diseases (and sealers) and then later decimation by Maori (Ngāti Tama and Mutanga).

I was fascinated to note the relative paucity of endemic trees, not least kowhai. I have planted a number of kowhai including *Sophora chathamica*, assuming it must have originated from the Chatham Islands. Alas, there are no endemic kowhai. This one bears the name of the Islands due to early botanists mistakenly believing that that was its origin. It is in fact a coastal, mainland NZ, kowhai.

A tree that does have huge significance in the history of the Islands is the karaka tree; however it is not endemic. Its Moriori name is Kōpi and was of huge significance to the early settlers who brought its seeds from the mainland during their waka migrations. Its decayed bark burns slowly, with intense heat, and was used for smoking kai moana. Rākau momori carvings (dendroglyphs) were imprinted into the living kōpi trees to represent beloved ancestors (karāpuna) or important events. These ancient trees are declining due to rapid changes in forest habitat and pasture expansion.

The Hokotehi Moriori Trust has 'embarked' on a project to try and preserve this art. The kōpi berries (drupes) were an important carbohydrate food source for the Moriori. The outer flesh is edible, but the kernel contains a very toxic poison, karakatene. To get rid of this poison, the seeds were placed in flax baskets and steamed for a long time in stone-heated ovens. They were then transferred to dried flax sieves and placed in streams till the husks rotted off. The kernel was then dried and stored to provide the Moriori with important food. The symptoms of poisoning, through eating the raw kernel, are convulsions and severe itch. The sufferer, often young, was placed in a hastily dug sand pit in a standing position, gagged with arms and legs bound, and left buried up to the chin until the symptoms subsided!

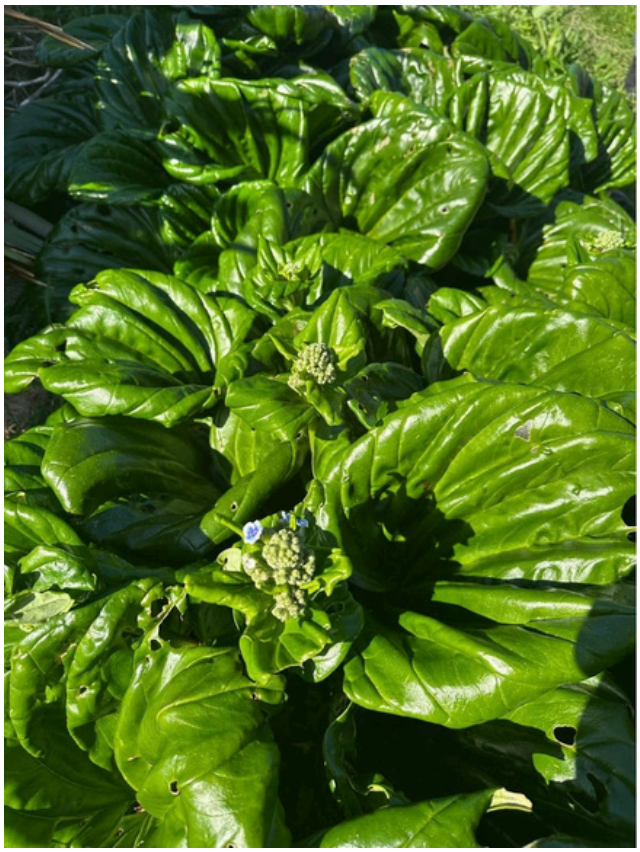
The Chatham Island lily (*Myosotidium hortensia*) is endemic. It has been decimated by wild pigs, but we did see some magnificent specimens on the coast. Early colonists sent seed back to Cornwall where it flourished and botanists knew it as a sort of 'forget-me-not' as they did not know of such a place as the Chathams!

I can thoroughly recommend a guided visit to the Chathams, a unique ancient volcanic remnant of the continent of Zealandia: best you go in summer.

- **Rick Acland**



Dendroglph on Kōpi tree



Myosotidium hortensia

Lophomyrtus obcordata -Rohutu

Rohutu is a great flowering small New Zealand native tree. Some may also describe it as a large shrub, but fully grown it is a well flowered and interesting tree.

Growing up to 6-8 metres tall it forms a strong slender trunk surrounded by many upright thinner leafy branches. Older trees have an attractive mottled bark with smooth patches of various coloured bark and freshly exposed creamy or creamy/greenish bark.

The small leaves are heart shaped (obcordate), attached at the pointed end with easily seen veins and spotted with tiny glands. It is easily identified in the wild. With the advent of myrtle rust this tree's threat status was upgraded to Threatened – Nationally Critical. Currently myrtle rust has been recorded in some populations.

Flowering in December and January the individual flowers have 4 petals with the flower being about 1 cm across. Numerous white stamens protruding from the centre of the flower make flowering obvious. On older trees growing in sunny locations many more flowers will be produced making it an attractive flowering tree. In shady positions fewer flowers are produced but still nice to see.

After flowering very dark red or almost black fruit appear each having several hard seeds. While not very edible the fruit has a spicy flavour like other myrtles. Lophomyrtus obcordata can be found in many parts of New Zealand especially on the east coast although distribution is somewhat patchy. It grows well in coastal and lowland forests and occasionally into montane zones. Banks Peninsula has many records of this plant in iNaturalist. It is quite drought resistant which indicates it would be a good plant for the future.



Interestingly several plants of *Lophomyrtus obcordata* growing at Riccarton Bush host one of New Zealand's smallest mistletoes Korthalsella lindsayi. Future plantings of rohutu here and other places would be a wise idea to provide succession options for the mistletoe.



As a small tree with many fine branches, it is useful in garden areas and conservation areas to provide an ideal support for growing fine stemmed native clematis and parsonsia. It has also been grown as a hedge or shelter plant. *Lophomyrtus obcordata* crosses easily with the larger leaved species *L. bullata,* and both natural and artificial crosses as well as mutations have produced a wide range of plants many of which have been given cultivar names and propagated for sale. However, the true species is still a very attractive and versatile plant for our landscape.

- **Alan Jolliffe**

Garden of the Sleeping Giant, Nadi, Fiji

Most people head to Fiji to relax, swim and snorkel on the coastal beaches, knowing little of this charming garden only a 10 minutes drive north of Nadi airport. Nestled in the foothills of the Sabeto mountain range the garden was established in 1977 by the late Raymond Burr, a Canadian actor who stared in the TV series Perry Mason and Ironside. He had a passion for tropical orchids and the gardens showcase over 1,000 varieties. Although not all will be in flower at any time, making a good reason to return at another season, the display is always prolific and varied. The orchids are mainly grown in pots and displayed amongst an attractive rockery background, although some are epiphytic . All five Orchidaceae sub species are represented including the delightful *Oncidium* (dancing lady) orchids in multiple colours and the showy *Cattleya* (queen of orchids).

Whilst the orchids are the main attraction for many, after viewing the display at the start of the garden visit, wandering along the well marked paths through the 20 hectares of lush tropical planting focusing on Fiji's native plant species is also a pleasure. A wooden walkway passes a large lily pond and meanders through extensive cool tropical rainforest canopy vegetation, climbing slowly before opening up at the top of the mountain to reveal a panoramic view of the plains and coastline of the island. A walking trail through mountain landscape continues along the ridge for a few kilometres.

One of the plants I found the most interesting was the climbing herbaceous vanilla vine (vanilla planifolia) itself an orchid, which still has to be hand pollinated explaining the high cost of those beautiful dried vanilla pods and the pure essence, all of which make great souvenirs. Other highlights included the jade vine (*Strongylodon macrobotrys*) native to the Philippines, which blooms fleetingly for around only 4 days as a spectacular string of luminous turquoise blossoms, a colour that is rare in the plant kingdom, and the striking "lipstick palm" (*Cyrtostachys renda*), a slender clustering palm with striking bright scarlet crown shaft and graceful arching feathery fronds growing up to 16 metres.

Practical information

Open daily 9am-5pm, no booking required. Best time to visit is early morning when the soft golden light displays them to their finest.

Adult cost is Fiji$35 (around NZ$28) which includes a refreshing complimentary fruit drink in the reception area after your garden visit.



Guided tours are available at no extra cost. Pair this with returning to wander at your own pace to get the most of the garden. Hire a car and driver or join a tour to get to the gardens which are up a steep and winding road into the mountain range.

- **Geraldine Trevella**



Friends' Contact Details

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