



Autumn 2006

SUBTROPICALS



SUBTROPICALS

is a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on the identification, growth requirements and sourcing of native and exotic subtropical plants (and tropicals) suitable for gardens in the milder parts of New Zealand.

AUTUMN

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**WINTER ISSUE
COPY DEADLINE**

All copy must be received by the 30th April 2006

Once more into the breach

Once again the plant fair and conference are upon us – only two months to go and so much to do. But we have a growing band of helpers and, I'm told, they are enjoying giving a hand, not only at our events but at Ellerslie too.

We need the members who propagate and grow plants in small numbers as a hobby to let us know if they are able to supply some to the Society stand. Many of you have plants in your gardens that are rarely to be found for sale but are of interest to other members. The Society is charging only a small commission on sales.

In all the confusion of last year, I did not thank our regular contributors for their efforts. Without them we would not have a magazine and we members would not benefit from their knowledge and expertise.

With deadlines already cropping up for the plant fair and conference, there was not time to include the index with this issue. Already under way, it will be sent out with the winter issue which, because the show will be a month earlier, will also be a month earlier.

Autumn arrived early – it was definitely here by February 10th. Does this mean that we will have a cold winter?

Marjorie Lowe
Editor

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Terry Hatch
Pauline Isaachsen
Kevin Johnston
Nick Miller
Barbara Parris
John Prince
Tim Saunderson
Rosemary Steele
Brian Timms
Martin Walker
Peter Waters

SUBTROPICALS magazine

EDITOR

Marjorie Lowe
Phone/fax
(09) 376-6874
marlowe@
subtropicals.co.nz
PO Box 91-728
Auckland 1030

COVER DESIGN SCANNING

Grant Bayley
(09) 849-4505
gbdesignz@
clear.net.nz

WEBSITE

www.subtropicals
.co.nz

FRONT COVER STORY

VIREYA HYBRIDS

Barbara Parris

The genus *Rhododendron* contains about 850 species, of which more than 300 are in subgenus *Rhododendron*, section *Vireya*. *Vireya* rhododendrons have a wide distribution from the Himalayas to Vietnam, Australia and the Solomon Islands, with many species (167) in New Guinea. They grow naturally on the ground and as epiphytes, in a variety of vegetation types from sea level up to 4000m altitude, their prime requirements being high light levels and adequate moisture.

Vireyas were first cultivated in Britain as heated green-house plants during the nineteenth century. A few were even available in New Zealand c. 1880, presumably as greenhouse shrubs, as they were being sold in Otago. More than five hundred hybrids were made from the original introduction of a few species: *R. jasminiflorum*, *R. javanicum* (including *R. brookeanum* and *R. teysmannii*), *R. longiflorum*, *R. malayanum* and *R. multicolor*. Only eight of the early hybrids are still available today: Clorinda, Ne Plus Ultra, Pink Delight, Pink Seedling, Princess Alexandra, Princess Royal, Souvenir de J. H. Mangles and Triumphans.

Interest waned in Britain during the first part of the twentieth century primarily because heated greenhouses became too difficult to maintain and gardening staff were not available during the First World War. In the latter part of the twentieth century, new species of vireya rhododendrons, particularly from New Guinea, became available to horticulturalists and stimulated a revival of interest in hybridisation. Modern vireya breeding is now largely carried out in New Zealand, Australia and the west coast of the United States, rather than in Britain and, to date, over nine hundred hybrids have been named.

Front cover:

Growing underneath a tall, multi-trunked oleander in a Remuera garden, is a raspberry-red vireya rhododendron. The owner can't remember its name and has lost the ticket.

Inside front cover:

Clockwise from top left:

Rhododendron viriosum*, *R. laetum*, *R. aurigeranum*, *R. macgregoriae*, *R. konorii* and *R. jasminiflorum

Photos: Barbara Parris

Only a few of the three hundred plus vireya species now known have been used in the breeding of the modern hybrids. A check on the parentage of as many cultivars as could be located shows that *R. aurigeranum*, *R. christianaiae*, *R. jasminiflorum*, *R. javanicum* (syn. *R. brookeanum* and *R. teysmanii*), *R. konorii*, *R. laetum*, *R. leucogigas*, *R. macgregoriae*, *R. viriosum* (hort. *R. lochiaae*) and *R. zoelleri* are the most important parent species, with *R. commoniae*, *R. gracilentum*, *R. herzogii*, *R. longiflorum*, *R. loranthiflorum*, *R. phaeocephalum*, *R. saxifragoides* and *R. stenophyllum* less commonly used and *R. aequabile*, *R. anagalliflorum*, *R. bagoborum*, *R. christii*, *R. dielsianum*, *R. inconspicuum*, *R. intranervatum*, *R. leptanthum*, *R. orbiculatum*, *R. pauciflorum*, *R. phaeochiton*, *R. retivenium*, *R. retusum*, *R. rubineifolium*, *R. suaveolens*, etc. occasionally used.

The following is a descriptive list of the ten most important species used in the breeding of vireyas, together with some recommended cultivars – these are trouble-free, have strong constitutions and have flowered for more than twenty weeks a year for me. Those marked • were illustrated and described in Subtropicals volume three, number three (2004).

R. aurigeranum (New Guinea) is a very tall-growing yellow-flowered species with rather narrow leaves; the flowers are sometimes flushed orange with age. Hybrids of *R. aurigeranum* tend to inherit its rather leggy nature and benefit from pruning when young. Recommended are Buttermaid, •Flamenco Dancer, Gilded Sunrise, Mellow Yellow and Salmon Sensation. The flowers of Buttermaid, •Flamenco Dancer and Gilded Sunrise are yellow, lightly flushed peach with age, while those of Mellow Yellow are light yellow and those of Salmon Sensation are salmon with a yellow throat.

R. christianaiae (New Guinea) has yellow-orange flowers on a compact medium-sized shrub. Most hybrids appear to resemble their other parent rather than *R. christianaiae*. Recommended are Arthur's Choice - compact growing, coral flowers; Clare Rouse - tall growing, yellow and orange flowers, Just Peachy, compact growing, creamy apricot flowers and •Tango Time, fairly compact habit, flowers orange with yellow throat.

R. jasminiflorum (Peninsular Malaysia, Sumatra, Borneo and Philippines) has slender pale pink to white fragrant flowers on a low spreading bush. Most hybrids have slender pastel coloured flowers. Recommended are First Light – a compact bush, light pink slightly fragrant flowers, Lullaby and Star Posy, both with fairly compact habit

R. javanicum (Sumatra, Java, Borneo and Philippines) is a variable species with flower colour ranging from yellow to orange. Like *R. aurigeranum* and *R. laetum*, it needs pruning when young. Recommended are John Silver, Orange Queen and Shepherd's Warning - fairly upright habit, flowers are shades of orange, Tiffany Rose - small upright bush, medium pink flowers, Tropic Fanfare - open rather sprawling habit, bright red flowers.

R. konorii (New Guinea) has large carnation-scented pale pink to white flowers. Most of its hybrids have inherited some fragrance. Recommended are Calavar - fairly compact habit, medium pink flowers with yellow throat, Cherry Pie - spreading open habit with medium pink flowers - Esprit de Joie - tall shrub, flowers pale to medium creamy pink and fragrant, Felicitas - fairly compact, upright bush, very pale pink slightly fragrant flowers, Great Scent-sation - fairly compact shrub, medium pink strongly scented flowers, Lipstick - low compact habit, light pink flowers.

R. laetum (New Guinea) is considered to be the best of the yellow-flowered vireya species. The flowers may be tinted red, orange or pink with age. Like *R. aurigeranum*, it is tall-growing, but not all of its hybrids inherit this characteristic. Recommended are •Brightly - compact habit, orange-scarlet flowers, Cameo Spice - tall open shrub, creamy peach fragrant flowers, •Carillon Bells - miniature with medium pink bell flowers, Cordial Orange - upright habit with narrow leaves and orange flowers, George Budgen, Simbu Sunset and Tropic Glow - upright habit, orange flowers with yellow throat - George Budgen has performed best of the three, Java Light and Niugini Firebird - vigorous open habit, bright orange flowers, Jiminy Cricket, Saxon Blush and •Saxon Glow - miniatures with coral flowers, those of Saxon Blush are paler than the other two, •Kisses - fairly compact habit, flowers pink with cream throat, •Lemon Minuet - miniature with cream bell flowers flushed pink, Orangemaid - upright habit, light orange flowers, Pindi Pearl and Sweet Wendy - tall upright habit, fragrant cream flowers sometimes flushed pink, Sweet Wendy is the more floriferous of the two, Scarlet Beauty - fairly compact habit, light red flowers, Wattlebird - very tall, open habit, yellow flowers, Yellow Bunny - upright habit, soft yellow flowers. and slightly fragrant flowers that are very pale pink in the former and light pink in the latter, •Pendance, reasonably vigorous, tubular pale pink flowers, Princess Alexandra fairly compact in habit, white flowers flushed very pale pink, •Maid Marion and Salmon Star, fairly compact habit, soft apricot flowers.

R. leucogigas (New Guinea) has the largest leaves and flowers of any vireya; the flowers are white and scented. None of my *R. leucogigas* hybrids except for Salmon Sensation (see *R. aurigeranum*) have yet flowered for more than twenty weeks (some are young plants), but they have a huge 'wow' factor and always attract a lot of attention. Large leaves and large fragrant flowers characterise the hybrids. Anatta Gold is tall, with deep yellow flowers. Big Softie - has enormous very pale pink scented flowers. Bob's Crowning Glory - has slightly scented pink flowers on an open spreading bush and is fairly shade tolerant. Bold Janus has an uptight habit and apricot yellow flowers. Chiffon Halo - has an open upright habit and light pink flowers with a whitish throat. Coral Halo - is similar to Chiffon Halo, but has coral flowers with a yellowish throat. Peach Puff has a compact habit and soft peach pink flowers. Rio Rita is fairly compact and has very large medium pink flowers with paler throat and is named after one of our Subtropicals members, Rita Watson. Sweet Vanilla - is fairly compact and has cream flushed pink flowers.

•*R. macgregoriae* (New Guinea) is a variable species with usually yellow to orange, sometimes red, flowers on a bushy shrub. It is one of the most free-flowering species and most of its hybrids inherit its floriferous nature. Recommended are •Coral Chance - upright habit and soft coral-orange flowers, Golden Charm - fairly compact habit, attractive reddish-brown foliage, apricot flowers, Golden Chimes - compact habit, rich yellow flowers, •Happy Wanderer - low spreading habit, orange flowers, Popcorn - upright growth, white flowers), Rosy Chimes - miniature with medium pink flowers, Silver Thimbles miniature with white bell flowers.

Continued on page 26

Top:

The parentage of the ever popular Kisses is (Tropic Glow x [*R. viriosum* x *macgregoriae*]. Excellent grown in a pot.

Bottom:

This unnamed hybrid is from the Dr. Sleumer x *leucogigas* cross. Highly fragrant, the flowers are large and the opening buds are unusual in appearance. It was photographed flowering in the Mt. Eden garden of Geoffrey Marshall and John Hayward.

Photos: Marjorie Lowe





Encephalartos horridus.

Bernie Green

There are about three hundred species of cycads worldwide, with new ones being discovered occasionally, usually just before they are rendered extinct by forest clearing and/or over-collecting. Many of these are too tropical to grow outside anywhere in New Zealand (including some that turn up in large nurseries from time to time - it is always worth a quick peek in the palm section of King's Plant Barn, for example).

However, there are a number of species eminently suitable for our conditions, and some that seem to be marginal. No cycads, with the exception of the ubiquitous *Cycas revoluta* and *Zamia furfuracea*, are commonly available here and they will often command high prices when they are. Pay what you must, for any species you are likely to get in New Zealand is worth having. If you are lucky enough to find an unfamiliar one, check it out in a good book or with the Palm and Cycad Society **before** you plant it outside. They will all need excellent drainage and, in most cases, as much heat and sun as they can get. In fact, if you think of them as succulents you will not go far wrong, except that they will not deal at all well with dryness and should be watered in dry weather and fed a good tree-and-shrub fertiliser once or twice a year.

All this applies particularly to the genus *Encephalartos*, especially the prices! All in this genus are African, with most of the species suitable for our climate being from southern Africa. Some of them get very large, by suburban garden standards anyway. Many are spreading and spiny. *E. horridus* is relatively small and polite. It has very distinctive grey-blue leaves, up to a metre long, with the petiole starting out straight at the base, then curving and almost coiling at the tip. The leaflets are shaped rather like a narrow holly leaf, with the slight twist, the stiffness and several very sharp tips. The leaves tend to become a dull grey-green as they age, and will begin to brown off and die after a couple of years. I cut them off at this stage - a painful process, but worth it for the sake of appearances. The trunk stays fairly short, less than a metre (usually much less), and about 30cm across. The plant offsets vigorously, forming a beautiful and lethal thicket.

Top: A young *Encephalartos horridus* growing in full sun.

Bottom: An uncommon gesneriad, *Cobananthus caloclamys*, in a low, raised bed on the north wall of the house.

Photo: Geoffrey Marshall

Cycads do not flower, instead forming cones which are different in shape for males and females. The cone will usually stay on the plant for a year or so, then fall apart (and, eventually, off), while the trunk that has had cones may not leaf out that year. This seems to be quite variable. My *E. horridus* had cones last year, but I dared not try to contact anyone about the possibility of getting some pollen. The chance of getting some seeds was greatly outweighed by the possibility of alerting the wrong ears and losing my precious plant. There are thieves out there and they love cycads, and don't you forget it if you have unusual specimens!

Cobananthus caloclamys

(syn. *Alloplectus caloclamys*)

Geoffrey Marshall

I found this plant at John Kenyon's wonderful nursery at Te Puna as an unnamed house plant. Always on the lookout for something new, my attention was immediately caught by its silver-furred leaves and velvety orange-brown 'flowers'. The flowers turned out to be bracts and the furry tubular cream flowers, tipped with maroon, soon started emerging.

Cobananthus caloclamys is a sprawling sub-shrub with pointed green leaves, to about 15cm, covered with very short, dense, silver hairs. In late spring the plant starts producing bud clusters in the leaf axils as it grows. Initially, just the bracts open, looking like sterile flowers, then several weeks later the flowers emerge from the bracts. The flowers themselves don't last very long but the bracts stay colourful for weeks and, with the plants growing continually and producing more, they stay looking good for many months.

I'm growing it in bright semi-shade in a raised bed of gritty, humus-rich soil against a north facing wall and my Mt Eden garden has not experienced frosts since we built and developed the garden four years ago. The plant has layered itself where the stems are touching the ground but the two cuttings I tried didn't take. It is also spontaneously sprouting from older parts of the stem getting good light, so should be easily cut back if required.

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SUBTROPICALS GARDEN VISITS

Three gardens in Glendowie

Saturday, 1st April 2006

We meet at 2pm at Sally's at 38 Glendowie Road. An interesting garden with stunning views to Browns Island and Sally's mosaics will be available for purchase.

Proceed to Wayne and Eric's at 2:30pm at 44 Robley Crescent. A collector's garden with subtropical theme, currently under development.

Then walk along the stream to Glen and Bruce's at 54 Robley Crescent, a mature garden with a subtropical theme also.

We will finish with tea and coffee at Glen and Bruce's. Please bring a plate or packet of biscuits to share.

Please ring Eric on 575-2358
so that we can get an idea of numbers.

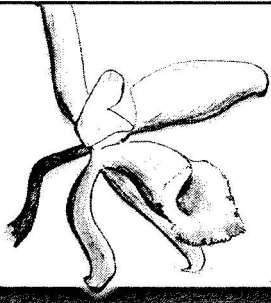
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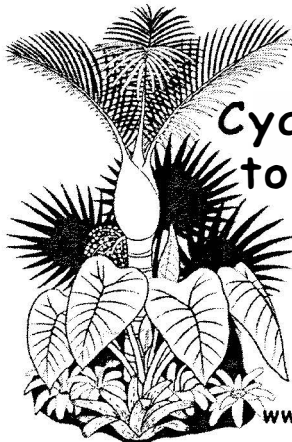
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BOOK REVIEW

Gingers of Peninsular Malaya and Singapore
by K. Larsen, H. Ibrahim, S.H. Khaw and L.G. Saw

Reviewer: Nick Miller

millern@wave.co.nz

This smallish soft-cover book was produced in 1999. It is published by Natural History Publications (Borneo), a firm which specialises in producing high-quality books on the flora, fauna, history and ethnography of the Southeast Asia region.

The book's 135 pages are packed with information and excellent illustrations of the various gingers which are found in peninsular Malaya. Some of these are strictly tropical, others are from the numerous highland areas and are therefore of potential interest to gardeners in New Zealand. A few are already in this country.

An introduction is followed by chapters detailing the relationships of the ginger family (Zingiberaceae), their uses and commercial importance, plant structure, pollination and seed dispersal, and a history of research into Malayan gingers. Then follow 69 pages detailing over 150 species in 18 genera.

Then follows a chapter on the plant chemistry of the gingers, one on the study and collection of the group, a fascinating chapter "Notes from a ginger naturalist" and some notes on their cultivation. Finally there is a checklist of all the gingers known in the Malay Peninsula and Singapore, and a bibliography.

The 118 colour photographs are uniformly excellent and in generous abundance. There are also some monochrome photographs, several paintings and drawings, and a map. This book is undoubtedly of a specialist and scientific nature, but it avoids excessive botanical jargon, contains mouth-watering illustrations and is likely to be much-valued by any collector of these remarkable plants. It is modestly priced and caught my eye at a bookshop in Kota Kinabalu (Borneo).

It may be ordered through Borneo Books (www.borneobooks.com) or through Touchwood Books, here in New Zealand. New Zealand price (Touchwood Books) \$35 plus \$5 P&P per order.

‘BLUE GINGER’ – only it isn’t blue and it isn’t a ginger!

Robin Booth

This must be one of the most spectacular purple flowering plants that I know and it is in flower now. *Dichorisandra thyrsiflora* is its scientific name. There are about twenty-five species in the genus native to tropical America and the West Indies. ‘Blue Ginger’ comes from southeastern Brazil.

In a glasshouse or in warmer climates, it can reach a metre or more in height, but I find at Wharepuke that the maximum is about 80cm. The plant gradually clumps up with generally unbranched, cane-like, fleshy stems arising from the base each spring. The dark green, lustrous leaves, which are purplish underneath, are generally towards the top of the canes. It prefers a semi-shady site in humus-rich soil with plenty of moisture over the summer. Some of my books say that it prefers a drying-off period in the winter, but my plant seem to survive the wet winters we have although most tropical plants are better able to stand our cold if it is dry then.

It is the crowded panicles, up to 15cm long, of rich, deep purple flowers crowning the top of the stems that make it such a show-stopper. The stamens of bright yellow make a contrast. A plant for a good, warm, well-drained position and well worth a try if you have the right spot.

***Begonia* ‘Pizazz’**

Edith McMillan

An attractive collection of plants (in Peter Brady’s front courtyard) where the foliage almost conceals the containers. These groups are a constantly changing feature depending on what is in flower or leaf.

The striking silver and cerise-pink lobed leaves belong to *Begonia* ‘Pizazz’, a new cultivar that was launched at last year’s Ellerslie Garden Show by Parva Plants. An evergreen, fibrous-rooted begonia with upright firm stems, it is frost tender; if the frost is not too severe it will come away again in spring. The flowers are pink, hidden amongst the leaves, but it is the leaves that are the attraction.

It will be interesting to see how good it looks in winter (begonias tend to remain attractive) because this plant could well be a superior foliage plant to *Strobilanthes dyerianus*.





HEROIC GARDENS FESTIVAL

- TENTH ANNIVERSARY

It seems hard to believe that this festival, that has become an essential part of the garden year, has been going so long. Unlike so many garden tours the number of gardens is manageable (as long as you are fit and organised) and not repetitious, while the opportunity to talk about the plants you see with the grower is not to be missed. While new gardens continue to be included, I have always found it fascinating to view the changes made, both in style and plant material, and to see the maturing of plant growth.

Because I had a pulled a muscle in my leg I was unable to do my usual sweep of the gardens but managed to call in briefly to several of our members while delivering Subtropicals posters. I hobbled around and the photographs in this issue show some of the plants that caught my attention.

The spring issue featured a short article on coleus (*Plectranthus scutellarioides*) with small close-ups of the foliage variations. But to see coleus in perfect condition in the garden was such a delight – not nibbled by caterpillars, not a hole anywhere and in such health that many plants were at least 60cm high and more across. The colours ranged from a subtle greeny-gold (and frilled) to apricot-brown to fuchsia-pink (top left opposite) and every kind of marking and texture you can imagine. I was envious. Don O'Connor told me his secret weapon against hungry caterpillars was a fortnightly spray of Confidor while Kevin Kilsby assured me that living in the spray zone for the Painted Apple Moth was enough protection.

The top right photo opposite is of *Cordyline fruticosa*, either 'Pink Edge' or 'Kiwi Supreme'. This is of interest because too many of the colourful tropical cordylines are a disaster in winter, which is when (like *Tradescantia* (syn. *Rhoeo*) *spathacea*) everything that eats, attacks them. Growing in partial shade, this particular cordyline looks good all year round. Send C. 'Studmuffin' to the compost heap I say.

The north-facing, stucco walls in the photo below hold considerable heat during the day and release it at night making this a very warm (by our standards) spot for plants. The climber to the left is *Hoya carmosa* growing well in full sun and dry conditions. The orchid to the right is an oncidium, mounted and, again, in full sun. When told that the oncidium should be growing in partial shade, Peter Brady duly shifted it to another position only to find that it no longer flowered. One of the benefits of growing an epiphyte on a slab is that it is easily

moved. So now it has been returned to its original position and, as you can see, it is flowering well. Some leaves are yellowish in the sun and it would probably never win 'best in show' in an orchid competition but it is tough, a dependable, long-lasting bloomer and the brilliant yellow flowers make a sharp contrast against the terracotta walls, qualities that most addicted gardeners appreciate. I am going to follow Peter's example and move my non-flowering oncidium into the sun.

On page ten Geoffrey Marshall has written a short article on an unusual gesneriad, *Cobananthus caloclamys* (formerly *Alloplectus caloclamys*). This is an attractive sub-shrub that looks more like a groundcover. Like *hemerocallis*, this is a plant that seems to fit in with most kinds of garden style. It would look quite at home in a cottage garden. The apricot colour is uncommon and as it appears in the bracts, not the flowers, it is long-lasting. Because gesneriads, particularly African Violets and gloxinias, have generally been thought of only as houseplants their suitability as garden plants has not been considered. But *streptocarpus* and *kohleria* are now being used outdoors so this is a welcome addition. I would probably never have discovered this plant by myself. Over the years, the Heroic Gardens Festival must have introduced so many people, keen gardeners like me, to a large range of plants that will probably never be seen at a garden centre. In the case of this particular plant, the only reference I found was in the RHS dictionary and the only photograph seen (and a very poor one) was on the Edinburgh University website.

When I was young, garden competitions like the Yates one consisted of gardens where, except for the lawns, very little green could be seen. In fact you couldn't see the plants for the flowers - gaudy in the extreme. Interest in foliage plants, particularly evergreen plants, has been growing over the years. One of the reasons is probably because we are finally coming to terms with the kind of climate we actually experience, not the climates that are the basis for most of the garden books in the shops and libraries. (Phillips & Rix Volume 1 was titled "Conservatory and Indoor Plants". After they had visited Australia, New Zealand and South Africa the second volume was titled "Plants for Warm Gardens").

One of the noticeable aspects of Heroic gardens is this emphasis on the importance of foliage in achieving an all-year, good-looking garden (and low-care, no dead-heading required). From the colourful coleus, iresine and begonias (page 16) to the wealth of tropical and subtropical plants with interesting leaf shapes, markings, variegations and textures but predominantly green, foliage is the equal of flowers.

With the very tall *Canna x ermannii* or *C. iridiflora* you get both. The photograph top left, page 23 was taken in the Marshall/Hayward garden. The huge leaves look very much like banana/heliconia leaves and form a 2.5m partial, very casual hedge. The bright red flowers lighten up the dark green of the neighbour's trees. All the gardens I saw used cannas either for flowers or foliage or both and varied in size from half a metre high to these giants. As long as the soil is kept fertile, cannas can be very useful with their rapid growth to create the illusion of maturity, especially when starting from scratch on a bare section.

In the same garden, on the western side, is an enormous, old multi-trunked, pohutukawa. One trunk of this tree has been enriched with epiphytes, mainly orchids and bromeliads. Despite the brief length of time that has elapsed since being attached to the pohutukawa, the conditions are so suitable that the plants are firmly rooted and are colonising with abandon. The top right photograph is a close-up of the pseudobulbs of *Coeloglyne cristata*. Bright yellow-green in colour and accompanied by evergreen strap-like leaves, they are an attraction in themselves but there are also the showy flowers to follow. The bottom left photograph shows the variety of plant life that the tree now carries. With sections becoming smaller and smaller and our growing conditions conducive to the growth of epiphytes (not to mention the increasing availability of suitable plant material), I hope that some of the visitors to this garden are inspired to create a similar habitat. When you see all those aerial roots dangling from older pohutukawas you know you are in the subtropics (more or less).

The things that we read or are told that can't be done are numerous. Amongst them is the advice that the bromeliad, *Vriesea splendens* (Flaming Sword) is too tender to be grown outdoors in our climate. Yes it is tender but in its native habitat in Trinidad, Venezuela, Guiana and Surinam it grows in very damp and shady places on trees, on the ground and sometimes on rocks at 300-1300metres altitude.

Both Peter Brady and Don O'Connor are growing *V. splendens* outdoors but not in the garden. Peter's plant is shown bottom right on page 23. This was bought as a houseplant and has now been outside for a couple of seasons. The three flowerspikes are the second blooming and the vriesea is still in the same pot tucked into a heavily planted bed on the eastern side of the house. In the background is the firecracker red of *Begonia boliviensis* 'Dragons Wings', a tuberous begonia also available from the houseplant section at plant nurseries.

Don, on the other hand, is growing his *V. splendens*, tucked in with

other plants, in a cane basket high up under the plastic roof covering the spa pool. This has also survived two winters, 2004 being quite cool. I think we can take it that if care is taken in choosing a suitable place, drainage is excellent and humid, damp and shady conditions are provided then you too should be able to grow a 'Flaming Sword' outside. On page 38 is an illustrated article on Don's miltonia/miltoniopsis also growing by the spa pool.

And, lastly, a climbing/epiphytic succulent that, out of flower, looks rather like a green snake lying along a large branch of a jacaranda and waiting to pounce. Called *Hylocereus undata* (Night-blooming Cereus), it was first seen by Peter Brady growing outside the Tropic House at the Domain.

He found a plant for sale at Plantarama, took it home and potted it up. Placed alongside the house it grew and grew, in fact Peter said its growth was alarming. So he removed it from the pot and planted it at the base of a mature jacaranda, tying it to the trunk for support. Aerial roots attached themselves to the tree but because the plant was heavy, he gave extra support with plastic covered metal ties just visible in the bottom photograph on the back cover. And it continued to grow, up the trunk (two metres) and along the thick branch (another two to three metres) but not quite to the end. This branch extends over the complete width of the footpath, just above the heads of the passers-by.

The top photograph and insert were taken before the Heroic weekend (14/15th February) showing the first flower in profile and from above. A second opened on the Friday evening that started the weekend. When Grant Bayley took the second photograph on the 18th March there were nineteen or twenty flowers nearly ready to flower. As this is a night flowering plant that is heavily fragrant the scent must have been nearly overwhelming.

Although this year I was only able to have a quick look at a few gardens, there was so much of interest to see and plants to find out about that if you have not participated before you should endeavour to make sure that you do not miss out next year. Visitors are coming to Auckland from all over the North Island for the garden tour and some come every year.

Marjorie Lowe

Photos:

The photographs were taken by Grant Bayley and Marjorie Lowe.

The back cover photographs (top and inset) were taken by Mingbo and Larry Song.





THE WILD PINEAPPLE - *Ananas bracteatus*

Rosemary Steele

Wild, or red, pineapples grow naturally from the coastal areas of Brazil through Paraguay and into Argentina, and so are somewhat hardier than *Ananas comosus*, the pineapple of commerce. Here in New Zealand they grow vigorously with many basal offsets. The leaves are up to 1.5m long, sharp-tipped, with spines along the margins, so the plants are not suitable for planting close to paths. They flourish in warm sunny areas and produce deliciously edible fruit. The inflorescence is bright red with larger floral bracts than true pineapples and blue flowers.

We have grown wild pineapples for many years, initially in the glasshouse and then, when they got too big, in our growing house under light hail cloth. This clump is now huge and too shaded to produce good fruit, but in its prime we harvested eight good-sized fruit in one season. This year we are going to be able to enjoy our first fully outdoor fruit. The plant is growing in free-draining soil on a northwest-facing slope, somewhat protected by surrounding trees and shrubs. Now (early March) the fruit is already 15cm long and bright red, but as it matures over the next few months the colour will fade to greeny-gold.

Like *A. comosus*, wild pineapples have a terminal crown of leaves (technically a “coma”) but have a number of smaller offsets below the coma as well as below the fruit. Once the fruit is mature these can all be removed and used to grow more plants. I normally pull off any dead leaves and put the offsets into a free-draining bed of pumice over potting mix and keep them lightly watered until the roots appear, and then pot them into individual pots.

We also grow the variegated form, *A. bracteatus* var. *tricolor*, which has cream and green stripes along the leaves and red marginal spines. It is not as vigorous (but just as spiny) and has fruited for us once.

Top left:

***Ananas bracteatus* growing outdoors at Nestlebrae Exotics in Helensville, with three offsets in view and not yet ripe.**

Top right:

An almost ripe *A. comosus* fruit in the glasshouse.

Photos: Rosemary Steele

Bottom:

The variegated form, *Ananas bracteatus* var. *tricolor*, with its single fruit.

Continued from page 8

R. viriosum (Australia, = *R. lochia* of horticulture) is a compact shrub with bell-shaped deep pink to red flowers. It is very free-flowering, with thick-textured long-lasting flowers. The compact bush form, the frequency of flowering and the long-lasting nature of the flowers of *R. viriosum* are usually found in its hybrids. Recommended are Coral Flare - compact growth, coral flowers, Hot Gossip - low compact habit, deep pink flowers, Littlest Angel - miniature with red bell flowers, •Queen of Diamonds and Robs' Favourite - fairly compact habit, salmon pink flowers, Rob's Favourite is more compact, •Queen of Hearts - strong fairly upright growth, coral flowers, •Red Mountain - fairly compact habit, blood red flowers, Red Rover - rather sprawling habit, red flowers, Solar Flare - compact habit, bright pink, slightly fragrant flowers, Tropic Coral - compact habit, coral flowers.

R. zoelleri (New Guinea) is a tall-growing shrub with large yellow to orange-red flowers. Hybrids do not always inherit the height and flower colour. Recommended are Pink Parfait - moderately compact habit, light pink flowers, Red Rooster - compact low habit, light red flowers).

Note:

Vireya rhododendrons will feature prominently at this year's Plant Fair on the 27th & 28th May. Specialists, Spectrum Vireyas from Kaitaia, will be bringing a wide range of vireya hybrids.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Members are invited to write in about any problems they have with identification, health, where to place specific plants, etc.

As well, queries and comments are solicited on articles appearing in the magazine.

Our advisory members will endeavour to supply solutions and answers.

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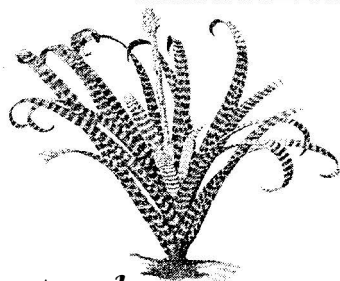
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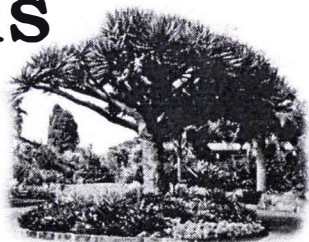
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SUBTROPICALS

ANNUAL PLANT FAIR & CONFERENCE

The big event for the year is being held on the weekend before Queen's Birthday, 27th and 28th May. A poster for the show is included with your magazine and we hope that you will find a prominent place to display it (your car, your workplace?) If you need more let us know. The more people we can attract to the plant fair, the more successful it will be. And of course the plants – our quota for bromeliads, clivias and palms is full but we welcome any member who has a speciality not already covered. And for those who have only a few plants to sell, we are setting up a society stand manned by volunteers.

The conference starts at 2:45pm on the Saturday and will have six guest speakers, the topics to be included in the next issue in late April. An application form is included for early booking as the space limits the numbers we can accommodate. One member described last year's affair as "a hoot". The dinner this year will return to being a buffet so that members can socialise at will.

And helpers, volunteers, slaves? We need loads of those. Ring Ian McPherson at (09)480-6847 or 021-448-438 for details.

WHAT'S ON

APRIL

PALM & CYCAD SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

Annual Palm & Cycad Sale

Saturday & Sunday 8th, 9th

9am-4pm at the

Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens

Hill Road Manurewa

JUNE

NEW ZEALAND CLIVIA CLUB

Winter Show, garden tour and guest speaker – Willie Le Roux

Saturday 3rd from 10am to 3pm

at

Joy Plants

Jericho Road

Pukekohe

LETTER/PHOTO COMPETITION

And the winner of the \$50.00 Touchwoods Books voucher is Brian Chudleigh of Katikati.

He writes -

'In the article "Magnolias with lush leaves" (Vol.3, no.4) by Rosemary Steele, *Magnolia macrophylla* was described but not illustrated. We planted one on our last property, back about 1977. It grew quickly, an unusual plant with huge leaves. It took about six or seven years to flower, an amazing bloom with six petals arranged in two layers of three, the inner ones having a purple-brown blotch around the centre.

At flowering, the plant must have been close to three metres tall. The branches were long, slender and pliable. The flowers were followed by huge seed pods the size of pine cones, like magenta velvet with bright orange seeds which were fully exposed as the pod dried up. The first stage photo was taken about four months after flowering and the dried up one seems to have been taken about 15 months after flowering.'

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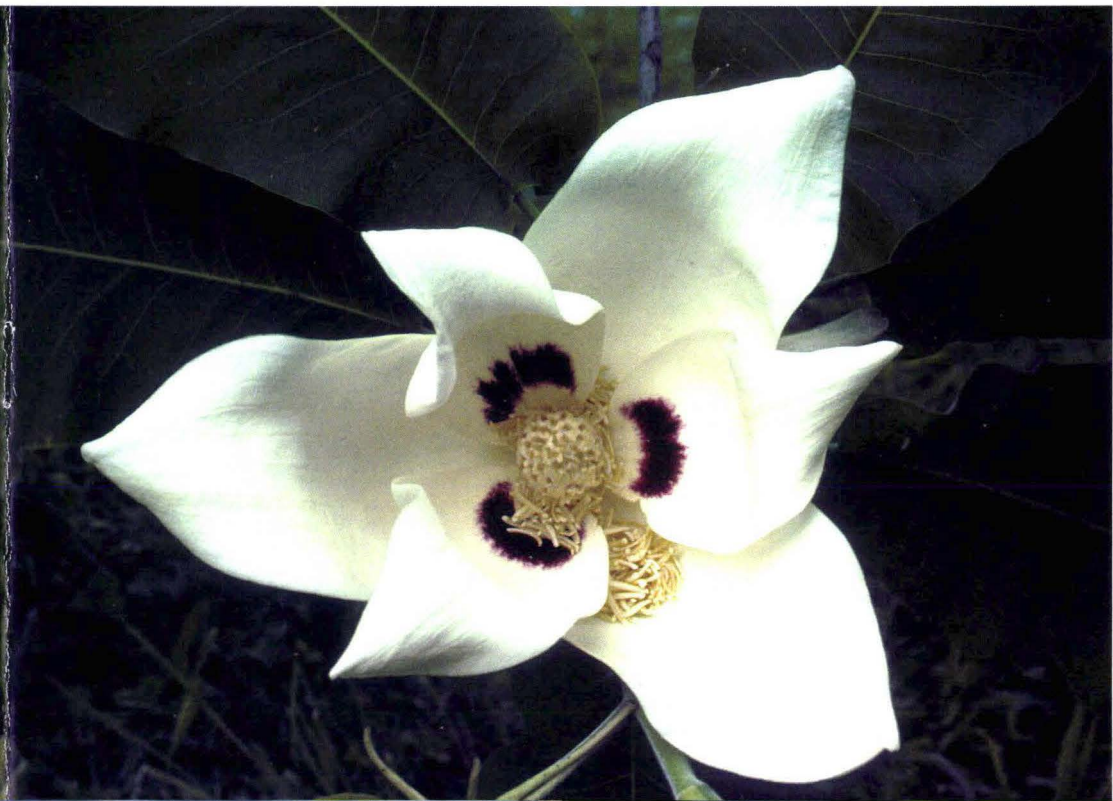
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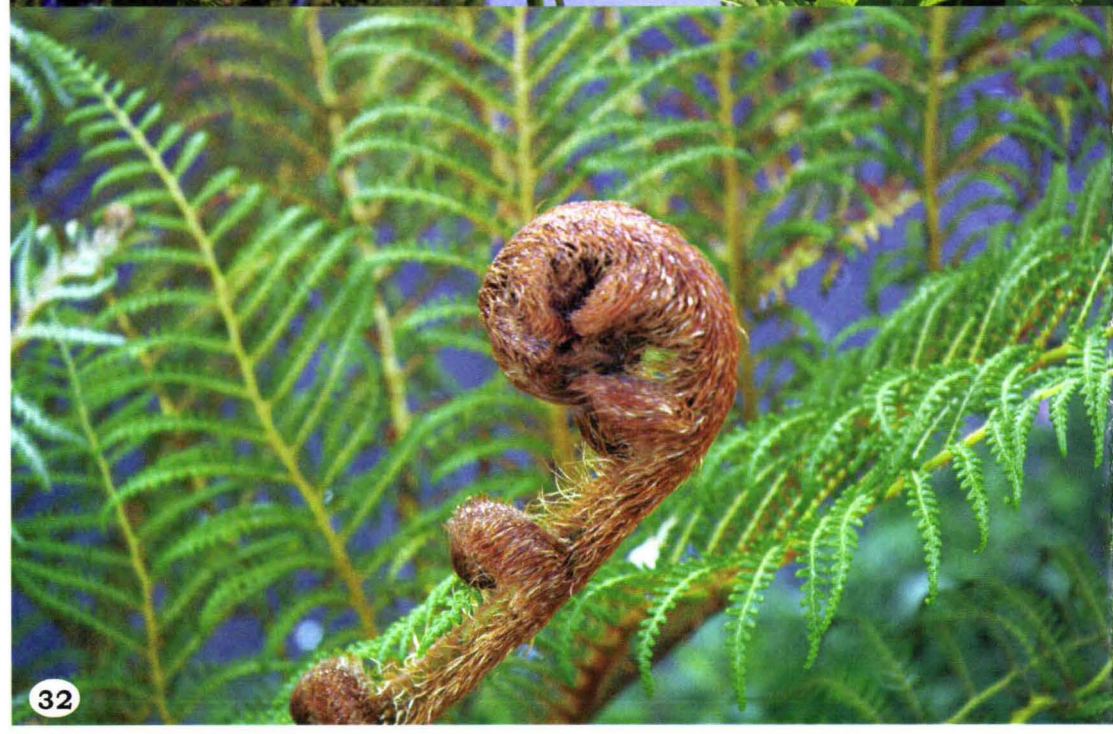
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TECOMA – Bold, bright and long-flowering Russell Fransham

The Aztecs, for all their fabled savagery, were great gardeners and they had some wildly-colourful native plants to choose from including dahlias, zinnias and bougainvillea as well as what they called Tecomaxochitl, which we now (thankfully) call **Tecoma**. The fourteen species of tecoma come from Central and South America and are closely related to *Tabebuia*, *Pandorea*, *Podranea*, *Campsis*, *Tecomaria* and *Distictis*. Interestingly, our rare native tecomanthe vine is also a relative of tecoma, as its name implies.

The flowers of tecoma are mostly vivid yellow or orange trumpets in terminal panicles. The most striking difference from other members of the family is that tecoma flowers are deliciously vanilla-perfumed. Some of them grow very well here and are well worth a spot in a sunny Northland garden.

Tecoma are a big group of mostly multi-stemmed large shrubs rather than trees, but ***Tecoma stans*** is the exception, occasionally growing to be a single-trunked small tree from three to five metres tall. It is sometimes called yellow elder and it certainly looks rather like the European elderberry until it flowers.

Its lacy foliage belies its toughness and resilience in poor conditions. The clear yellow flowers occur in big bunches throughout the warm months, and when we have a dry winter it continues to flower right through.

I have found a particularly fine-leaved form of *Tecoma stans* which tends to be smaller-growing, more compact and more weeping than the commonly seen variety, but a little more tender to frost and wind. *Tecoma stans* produces masses of skinny hanging pods like small beans, filled with tightly-packed papery seeds. Trimming off the pods now and then after flowering stimulates more flowers and keeps the tree shapely and lush.

Top:

Brilliant yellow flowers cover the small tree, *Tecoma stans*.

Photo: Russell Fransham

Bottom:

An unfolding frond of the hardy New Guinea tree fern, *Cyathea tomentosissima*.

Photo: Barbara Parris

An extract of *Tecoma stans* leaves has been traditionally used in Central America to treat candida infections and also diabetes and digestive problems.

An especially brilliant garden species is ***Tecoma alata***, whose orange and yellow trumpets are borne almost all year on a big vigorous bush with larger, stiffer leaves. This one gets up to about four metres quite quickly and also needs an occasional cutback to keep it looking lush and dense. Its flamboyant display and mouth-watering, fruity, vanilla perfume make it a seductive addition to the garden. The foliage tends to be coarser than *T. stans* with darker reddish petioles and stems.

I have found that both these species are very robust, generally evergreen, and prone to hybridising with each other to produce plants that are intermediate in foliage, form and flower colour. They grow well from cuttings and, if you have a good variety, it is best to propagate it that way. The young plants will flower within months. Even from seed tecoma will often flower within twelve months.

A major cutback to stump height every few years can keep these beauties lush and heavy-blooming, otherwise they can become woody and sparse with age. Average drainage, full sun and shelter from strong wind and frost will ensure lush growth and a dazzling display of flowers for nine months of the year, peaking in mid to late summer.

The familiar orange-red-flowered tecoma (*Tecomaria capensis*) hedge plant, often seen around old seaside baches, is now called ***Tecoma capensis*** and comes from South Africa. It is really a shrubby vine and can be a menace if left un-trimmed as the lanky shoots will take root where they touch the ground. The skinny tubular red flowers are full of nectar, which I hadn't realised till I watched kaka feeding on them in suburban Whangarei !

CYATHEA TOMENTOSISSIMA

Barbara Parris

Cyathea tomentosissima is native to the high altitude subalpine grasslands and shrubberies of New Guinea above the treeline and has not been found in forest. Maximum exposure to sun is ideal for cultivation in New Zealand and, if maximum exposure also means frost, well, the highlands of New Guinea are certainly frosty and *C. tomentosissima* will handle a couple of degrees of frost with aplomb.

Being a truly tropical species with no dormancy mechanisms, new fronds will be produced throughout the year, although more slowly in winter. My plant has had young unrolling fronds covered in hoar frost (yes, in the supposedly winterless north) and suffered no damage whatsoever. In hard winters when *C. brownii* and *C. medullaris* can suffer frost damage to mature fronds, this species is completely unaffected.

It is one of the smaller tree ferns, with a trunk less than three metres tall and fronds not much more than one metre long – features that are an advantage for smaller gardens. My plant is fifteen years old, with a trunk about half a metre high, which is very slow-growing for a tree fern. In contrast, seven-year-old plants of *C. brownii* grown here have trunks more than two metres high and fronds two metres long. The young unrolling fronds of *C. tomentosissima* are densely covered with brown scales and the narrow thick-textured pinnules of mature fronds are rolled under at the margin. Plants become fertile at a young age and the sori more or less cover the entire under surface of the fronds. Like all tree ferns, it needs the dead fronds removed; they can be chopped up coarsely and spread over the roots.

My plant gets sun for most of the day, and has a cool root run under a large slab of concrete that provides a good deal of rain water run-off around the roots. It appreciates summer watering and copes very well with winter wet. Probably it would also handle a certain amount of summer drought. Two to three weeks without rain don't seem to worry it, but I haven't tried it longer without watering because there are more water needy ferns growing underneath it as ground cover.

I have grown *C. tomentosissima* on alkaline clay over basalt boulders and currently have it on river silt over acid white rhyolite clay. On free-draining volcanic or sandy soils more summer watering would be needed. Like all my ferns, it gets a twice-yearly application of general fertiliser, e. g. Nitrophoska Blue. It is a tough easy-care plant, untroubled by pests, and deserves to be better-known. I highly recommend it for a sunny spot in the garden.

Palm & Cycad Society of New Zealand

**meets on the first Tuesday of each month excepting January.
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Enquiries:

Phone (09) 296-7699, PO Box 3871, Auckland

PLANT SOURCES for this issue

Ananas bracteatus –

Nestlebrae Exotics, Helensville, Landsend, Oratia, Auckland

Ananas comosus -

Lake Ngatu Plantations, Kaitaia (09) 406-7570

Begonia boliviensis ‘Dragons Wings’

Generally available in flower from plant centres

Begonia ‘Pizazz’ -

A new cultivar launched at Ellerslie last year by Parva Plants (mail order) and available at plant centres

Canna x ermannii – usually sold as **Canna iridiflora**

Landsend, Nestlebrae Exotics

Cobananthus caloclamys (Alloplectus) -

As far as we know this attractive gesneriad is not available commercially at present, but Geoffrey Marshall has offered plant material for two of our members to keep it in circulation. (Too many plants have been lost to gardeners because they are not ‘commercial’).

Coelogyne cristata -

Pottering About, Whakatane (several species), Tuckers Orchid Nursery, (09) 445-6692, 0274-971-820

Cordyline fruticosa ‘Pink Edge’ or ‘Kiwi Supreme’ -

Needs to be hunted, Plantet Earth has a very similar one

Cyathea tomentosissima -

Landsend, Oratia

Dichorisandra thyrsiflora -

Nestlebrae Exotics, Plantet Earth, Kumeu, Russell Fransham

Encephalartos horridus -

Not easy to find – try the Palm and Cycad Annual Sale – see What’s On

Hylocereus undatus -

Peter Brady will sell cuttings, Landsend has two types, one fruiting, Lake Ngatu Plantations, Kaitaia

Magnolia macrophylla-

Caves Tree Nursery, Hamilton Mail order (07) 827-6601

Miltonia orchids –

Tuckers Orchid Nursery

Oncidium species -

Pottering About, several types, Tuckers Orchid Nursery

Plectranthus scutellarioides (Coleus) -

Plant centres as houseplants, cuttings from friends

Strobilanthes gossypinus -

Nestlebrae Exotics, Russell Fransham, Landsend

Tecoma alata, stans -

Russell Fransham

Vireyas -

John Kenyon, Te Puna Cottage Gardens, Tauranga (07) 552-5756

Spectrum Vireyas, Kaitaia (027)-612-3221, Landsend has Rio Rita and Plantet Earth, Kumeu has a wide range

WHAT PLANT IS THIS?

In the summer 2005 issue we included a photograph of what was obviously a member of the passionfruit family and asked members if they could identify the plant.

We asked Rosemary Steele and John Prince of Nestlebrae Exotics who specialise in *Passiflora*. The reply was immediate. It is *Passiflora mixta* they said. I had never seen this species in the flesh or even in a photograph so had not recognised it. Even the Auckland Regional Council National Surveillance Plant Pests book did not include a photograph.

The bad news? It is an offence for anyone to knowingly propagate, distribute, spread, sell, offer for sale or display this plant. This has applied since the 1st July 1997. So this is an attractive plant that will not be seen in your garden!

BACK ISSUES

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???

**Has anyone noticed the enormous number of shed cicada skins
about this year?**

**It bodes ill for future damage to plants. Holes everywhere from
emerging cicadas and eggs already laid no doubt. Is there any
prevention possible?**

MILTONIA or MILTONIOPSIS?

Jonathan Voysey

The orchid shown opposite was bought as an unnamed *Miltonia* hybrid. However, it looks suspiciously like a *Miltoniopsis* hybrid, which is a much better choice for a subtropical garden.

Miltonias are mostly found in Brazil and require warmer growing conditions than the epiphytic miltoniopsis, which are found in very wet cloud forests mainly in Colombia and Ecuador at 500-2000 metres.

Plenty of water is needed all year and a position both shady and humid with good air movement to keep the flowers well drained. This helps to prevent marking. Because of their appearance, some of the miltoniopsis hybrids are called 'pansy orchids' and some are fragrant.

Don O'Connor's spa pool is open on one side to the swimming pool, and enclosed on the other sides by trellis. A plastic roof covers some of the structure. At the base of these walls, raised beds contain all manner of flowering and foliage tropical and subtropical plants – anthuriums, aroids, bromeliads, caladiums, calatheas, clivias, ferns, orchids, palms, tacca and more. It is amazing how much can be fitted into a small space, creating an 'almost' jungle. The (?) miltoniopsis has been grown in a pot rather than epiphytically so can be easily moved around for a colour hit.

Strobilanthes gossypinus

Rosemary Steele

Strobilanthes gossypinus is a shrubby species, native to India and Sri Lanka, which is rapidly gaining popularity in New Zealand gardens. We got our plants from Robin Booth about five years ago and planted them on a free-draining, sunny slope. Now the two bushes have grown into one glorious mound of silvery-gold leaves, much admired by all our visitors. (The leaves are actually green, but are so densely covered with fine creamy hairs as to appear silver and, where they are densest on the new leaves, gold).

Each plant is at least 1.5m tall and 2m across. They have been unaffected by light winter frosts, although a couple of branches have broken off in storms. However, once a bad frost by our standards did get up the slope they are on, and singed some leaves on the top. So far they have not flowered but, when they do, there will be soft blue to lavender flowers in the leaf axils at the ends of the stems.



