

**Sunset Western Garden Book. "40 th Anniversary Edition". Sunset Publishing Company. 1995. 624pp. \$39.90**

Reviewed by Rhys Gardner

This outstanding gardening book had its last major revision almost 30 years ago. I have used a previous edition since the early 1980s, finding its coverage for exotics grown in NZ virtually complete and prizing it for its non-technical descriptions and pithy remarks on growing and enjoying these plants.

"Western" in the title refers of course to the USA west of the Rockies, from Washington State at more than latitude 45 °, to southernmost California at about 30 °, and inland from Montana to Arizona and New Mexico. There would be few New Zealand conditions that are not duplicated somewhere here among the 24 climate zones this area is divided into. It is though most relevant to the drier parts of our country, and especially good if one wants to have a garden that needs little or no watering.

The first parts of the book are on glossy paper, with many colour photographs. There are the descriptions of the climate zones, then a guide to choosing plants. As well as conventionally-headed sections like: "Landscape plants with showy flowers", "Annuals for seasonal colour", "Bulbs and bulblike plants", "Colourful fruits and berries", and "Plants with coloured foliage", the guide has some more unusual ones: "Fragrant plants", "Flowers for cutting", "Plants that attract butterflies and hummingbirds", "Plants to use near swimming pools" (and tennis courts?), "Plants for under oaks", and even "Plants that resist deer".

More than 6000 plants are described in the encyclopaedic section, each genus being given at least one neat green and grey sketch. This section is on dull paper, with highlighted tables, notes, and homilies with titles like "All Those Peach Varieties Do Entice", "How Palms Date", "The Horrid Cousin of Pampas Grass", and "Sudden Leaf-Shedding on a *Ficus benjamina*". The larger genera, particularly the fruit trees and better-known ornamentals, are given highlighted comparative tables. The five and a bit pages of table on *Eucalyptus* are notable, with the heading "Best Features and How to Encourage Them" containing entries like this one for *Eucalyptus globulus*:

"Most common gum in California. Aromatic and great windbreak, but too messy, greedy, and brittle for garden or city street. Best on coastal slopes".

Two more quotes here show something of the experience that has gone into making these gardening and botanical notes, and the book's usefulness in NZ conditions:

"*Ligustrum lucidum* Before planting this tree, weigh carefully the advantages listed above (appearance, growth capabilities) against the disadvantages. Eventual fruit crop is immense; never plant where fruits will fall on cars, walks or other paved areas (they stain). Fallen seeds (and those dropped by birds) profusely sprout in ground cover and will need pulling. Many people dislike the flower's odour, and the fruiting clusters are bare and unattractive after fruit drop.

*Stipa tenuissima* Mexican feather grass, Texas needle grass. Very thin bright green leaves form erect clumps that arch outward toward the top. Numerous thin flowering stems divide and redivide into almost hairlike fineness, green at first then golden. Single or scattered clumps are effective among ground covers or boulders, on slopes. Larger plantings can create effective erosion control. Water regularly, but soil should dry out between irrigations. Can self-sow in irrigated gardens."

Plants are listed in alphabetic order by genera, but their families are given, an improvement on my older edition. The names are without authorities. Common synonyms are cross-referenced, some of these being old names that persist through the efforts of the nursery trade, *Dracaena australis* for *Cordyline australis*, for example.

Later parts of the book include general gardening advice, a temptingly-photographed guide to botanical gardens, estate gardens, and arboreta (including those of Hawaii, for some reason), and a list of mail-order suppliers. There is a short account of the meanings of the most common Latin and Greek epithets and a guide to the pronunciation of c. 250 common generic names, where we are reminded that "feijoa" is a Spanish word (fayHOEuh), and that "hydrangea" consists of four syllables, not three. The Sunset world though, like ours, seems to be divided into people who give a toss about such things, with no decision being rendered on PitTOSporum or PittoSPORum.

Earlier editions of this work have been huge bestsellers (4 million copies between 1954 and 1994), enabling the current one to be offered at a fraction of the price of its competitors. In value for money, and also in the quality of its information, it is far and away the best gardening book I know of.

## ***Gastrodia* aff. *sesamoides* in Auckland City (2)**

E. K. Cameron

### **Auckland City**

I read with interest Peter de Lange's article (de Lange, 1995) about the population of the potato or pot-bellied orchid (*Gastrodia* means "pot-bellied"), *Gastrodia* aff. *sesamoides* in Symonds Street, Auckland City discovered in December 1994. Can you imagine my surprise when I discovered a similar city population in another part of built-up Auckland on 8 December 1995. This new one is on the Parnell side of Newmarket, on the corner of Parnell Road and George Street. The orchids are in a planter at the Nestlé Building entrance, again less than 1m from a busy footpath.

The site is a triangular sloping planter, 6 m across with an 8 m tall silver birch tree, a low *Juniper* cultivar as dense ground cover and pine bark over the ground by the orchids. There were 15 orchid stems emergent through the *Juniper* and they were less than 50 cm apart; flowering stems were 24-85 cm tall; flowers per stem (4)-16-28; most flowers were fully open except one stem which was entirely in bud. The flowers were weakly scented, had a long column; perianth pale brown, white at the mouth, darkened towards the base with pale calli (bumps); stem shining pale brown with pale streaks. I vouchered two stems (AK 225971).

Two days later, for comparison, I visited Peter's site in Symonds Street. I counted 31 orchid stems over the bordered area 6 m x 5 m; stems 19-93 cm tall, some of the taller ones were on their side with only an erect tip; flowers per stem 4-46; they ranged from in bud to fully open, some were shrivelled and appeared to have suffered from sap-sucking insects. Under the rich *Casuarina* litter there was a thin covering of pine bark. The orchids were identical to the Newmarket ones.

The Newmarket site is more "up-market", being a well cared for bed in an attractive setting with higher light. The sloping bed with a high tree canopy means the potato orchids are clearly visible