

The Compositae or daisy family contains 900 genera and 14,000 odd species. New Zealand contains twenty nine genera, seven of which are known only from New Zealand. Not the least interesting of our native composites is the genus *Raoulia*, the group that includes those fantastic objects the vegetable sheep. The genus contains twenty species, and that courageous and enthusiastic grower of alpinists, Mrs. Bedford, gives her experience in growing seven of them.

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### GROWING RAOULIAS

Most people, even those usually disinterested in growing plants, are fascinated by my patches of *Raoulia* scabweed. Children pat and stroke them and want to jump on them, which was exactly my reaction when I first saw those remarkable cushions of *R. australis* at Baring Head, Wellington. Exposed to the wildest, fiercest conditions that Cook Strait alone knows how to brew, this hard convex mat plant seems adapted to withstand anything - found the length of the land, from sea level to 5,000 ft.

I grow it in my garden in scoria scree, in blue metal chips and between paving stones. One cushion 20 inches across has been under water several times this winter and now looks very dilapidated. But I think it will regain its former vigour, given a little dry weather. All definitely need sharp drainage, growing in sand or chips and given a stony ground cover, or they become sodden and rot. As the weather becomes warmer, the cushions become hard and close and the water sits in pools on the surface.

Those at Baring Head I have never seen surpassed - large, rounded, hard as a stone, in fact from the cliff top they appeared like stones on the beach. In flower the plant becomes a patch of gold, illusively perfumed; viewed under a glass, a thing of incredible beauty in both leaf and flower, followed by a fluffy carpet of hairy cypselas, taking flight with the least puff of wind.

*R. lutescens*: Also silver, is much smaller, closer and tighter, found from Tararua Mts. to Otago, 1,000 - 3,500 ft. Growing as it does in dry parts of Otago with a very low rainfall of 12" annually, it is a marvel it tolerates our torrents. I grow it in scree and it makes a cover over the scoria rock. In summer it is hard and close like a coat of paint. The flowers are bright yellow and cover the entire plant.

*R. tenuicaulis*: is a quick ground cover, less compact, silvery-green and its white flowers are produced long before other species. It has a distinctive perfume and each year I smell it for several days before realising what it is. It grows from Thames southwards, sea level to 5,000 ft.

R. subsericea: from the high country in the South Island does not really flourish for me - may be it is the altitude or the high rainfall and warmth, or all three. It makes a small mat here, silvery clear green, but is larger in all parts, its white flowers charming little daisies, which only occur over stone or path.

R. monroi: is a challenge to me - I have not succeeded in keeping it more than 18 months. It has quite a different form from all the others with its tiny imbricating branchlets of dirty looking silver, rather like old filagree. It sulks, it peters out, it remains static, or grows encouragingly only to unpredictably pass on. Although a southerner, it is one of the few to grow at sea level.

R. grandiflora: I have possessed several times - that is the most I can claim. For two years it just did not die in a pot, looked well enough but failed to increase, a lovely silver thing, much larger than R. subsericea. In the scree garden with rocks strategically placed, it could not be satisfied. I could give it the wet but not the altitude.

R. glabra: is an uncomplicated plant and obligingly grows anywhere well drained. Yellow green and a loosely formed plant, it provides fine contrast with the silver ones. Found from Mt. Egmont to Stewart Island, sea level to 4,000 ft.

R. haastii: is my most treasured and it never ceases to amaze me that it deigns to grow here at all. By much trial and error, I found a place to suit it - in scree, not full sun, and in summer I leave the tap dripping very slowly and the moisture seeps underneath. In late winter it turns brown but for the most part it is a marvellous bright green like a hard moss. A real aristocrat with temperament to match, found in river beds from Nelson to Otago, 1,000 - 3,000 ft.

I think the wonderful Vegetable Sheep, R. eximia and R. mammillaris are really impossible to cultivate - like many of the choice alpines, they value freedom above life.

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