

MY HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY NATIVE GARDEN

PAT MORRIS

2 De Thier Lane, Clifton, Christchurch

About ten years ago, shortly after buying this property we decided that the large lawn on the gentle west facing slope should go and be replaced it by native plants. The garden was not planted with any particular pattern in mind except that the chief gardener wanted to learn more about native plants and to be able to see as many as possible from the house.

The area is about 400 m² and the soil is heavy grey clay. With each planting a bucket of clay was removed and potting mix placed in the hole. Most of the plants have been sourced from the Department of Conservation at Motukarara, Letzgo Nursery at Governors Bay; Giller's Nursery at Woodend and, of course from Botanical Society members. The planting has been continuous as some specimens have died and the energy of the chief gardener has been finite. Her chief assistant has distributed bark over the whole area and seen to the watering system. The periphery of the area was planted in acacias, grevilleas, virgilians and other large exotic species, some of which have died while others have been cut out. There were already several large pohutakawas and a fine specimen of *Agonis flexuosa* which add beauty to the area when viewed from the house.

The previous owner had planted a large number of *Pseudopanax* and *Pittosporum* species around the property and these and the newly planted natives have attracted many birds. Silver eyes, fantails, grey warblers and bellbirds are common as are sparrows and blackbirds. We also have an occasional visit from a kingfisher.

After ten years there have been some successes and some failures. Several *Cordyline australis*, donated by kind Botanical Society members in the days when the Christchurch City Council seemed to have depleted nursery sources, have grown to a considerable height as have a titoki, several native beech trees, *Aristotelia serrata*, *Ascarina lucida*, and *Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*, and our rimu is now beginning to creep up. The hinau, although a long way from its ultimate height of 18m, is pushing up above the ngaio and ubiquitous akeakes around it. There are large specimens of a tree kowhai and a *Sophora prostrata* that seems determined to flower much of

the year, albeit sparsely. At the time of writing (late June) it and *Carmichaelia williamsii* are in flower while the corokias are laden with berries. The many species of grass - *Festuca*, *Poa*, *Carex*, *Chionochloa* - have thrived and multiplied, although this writer can not easily identify them. A *Gevuina avellana*, a Chilean nut-producing tree related to *Macadamia*, is a precious reminder of family connections in that part of the world.

To meet the need for a number of low growing shrubs so that the view up the slope is not obstructed there are 25 species of *Hebe* although some of the Wiri hebes have reached quite a height. At this time of the year *Libertia*, *Lophomyrtus*, astelias and native flaxes add welcome colour.

Of the 25 different divaricating plants in the garden a special mention goes to *Olearia fragrantissima*, *Coprosma virescens*, *Muehlenbeckia astonii* and the slower growing but nevertheless rewarding *Myrsine divaricata* and juvenile *Elaeocarpus hookerianus*.

We are very grateful for the mild climate and the availability of water which have allowed so many species to prosper.



Tangled branches of *Sophora prostrata*



Fig. 1. The garden in 1995; *Agonis flexuosa* in the background.



Fig. 2. In 2004, the *Agonis* shades a seat, for the elderly to view the garden.