

# **H** COMMERCIAL **HORTICULTURE**

MAGAZINE OF THE NURSERY INDUSTRY

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2023



**The Dominellos  
Australia's cut  
flower icons**

**How the garden  
industry fared in  
the cyclones**





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## ON THE COVER

*The new glasshouse at the UK's historic Woolbeding Gardens in West Sussex, is said to represent the cutting edge of technical design and engineering – its glass panels can turn to sepals and open like a flower. See story page 27.*

*Inset: The Dominello family has largely replaced fertilisers at its cut flower Sydney nursery with beneficial organism-rich worm tea. See story page 30*

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# COMMERCIAL HORTICULTURE

MAGAZINE OF THE NZ NURSERY INDUSTRY

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## WHAT WE SAY

### Bad weather blues

As I write this, the thoughts of all New Zealanders are with the people of the Hawke's Bay, Coromandel and elsewhere who have suffered so much from the recent cyclones, unprecedented in living memory. Some, we know, are in our garden industry although thankfully not many. One nursery for a time was incredibly under three metres of water. All we can say is that we trust and hope that in the fullness of time they and the others seriously damaged will be able to rebuild their lives and their businesses and return to some kind of normal.

We bring you coverage of the storms and their aftermaths in this issue of Comm Hort. Unfortunately this doesn't include coverage of the people worst affected, for the simple reason that, even two weeks after the events, they were still not able to be contacted. Nearly all the nurseries, garden centres and others we did contact came through the storms with little damage. How come?

Luck and locality must have played a part but also, in the case of nurseries, most are on land contoured with slopes. They need to be well drained too for their plants' sake, so they have the culverts needed to carry away excess rain. Most also have good shelter belts, which would have helped minimise wind damage.

But there is no doubt, bad weather events are bad for gardening especially at retail. People just stay indoors and don't garden or buy plants. What we need now are settled conditions, a great Autumn, and just hope the recent cyclones prove to be an aberration we won't see again. Isn't it amazing how quickly and unexpectedly things can change? This time last year we, especially in the North, were in the midst of one of the best Summers ever. At one stage we had 13 weeks with almost no rain. So now we've gone from drought to drenching. We were also coming off some of the best trading times ever in the garden industry, and a houseplant boom. Ahh, well, that's the nature of this business: it's very weather dependent and it's very 'how people are feeling' dependent. My prediction – things will tighten through Autumn and Winter but unless some other truly unexpected event happens, as Spring approaches people will once again find both the desire and the money to go back to gardening. – Des Snell

## Coming Up...

### MARCH 23

**Brisbane Garden & Plant Expo**  
12-13 Mar, Rocklea  
[www.plantexpo.com.au](http://www.plantexpo.com.au)

**Australian Landscape Conf**  
17-20 Mar, Melbourne  
[www.landscapeconference.com](http://www.landscapeconference.com)

**Kiwi Broms, Bromeliad Conf**  
23-26 Mar, Auckland  
[www.kiwibroms.bsnz.org](http://www.kiwibroms.bsnz.org)

**Intl Camellia Soc Congress**  
26-28 Mar, Maggiore, Italy  
[www.internationalcamellia.org](http://www.internationalcamellia.org)

**Melbourne Intl Flower & Garden Show**  
29 Mar-2 Apr, Melbourne  
[www.melbflowershow.com.au](http://www.melbflowershow.com.au)

**California Spring Trials (CAST)**  
29 Mar-2 Apr,  
[www.2022CAST.com](http://www.2022CAST.com)

### APRIL 23

**Tulip Festival Amsterdam**  
1-30 Apr  
Keukenhof Tulip Gardens  
[www.tulipfestivalamsterdam.com](http://www.tulipfestivalamsterdam.com)

### IFEX 2023

5-7 Apr, Makuhari Messe, Chiba, Japan  
[www.ifex.jp](http://www.ifex.jp)

### IPPS NZ Conference

20-23 Apr, Parnell Hotel Auckland  
[secretary.newzealand@ipps.org](mailto:secretary.newzealand@ipps.org)

**NZ Bonsai Show & Convention**  
21-23 Apr, Christchurch  
[www.bonsainz.com/events](http://www.bonsainz.com/events)

### MAY 23

**Chelsea Flower Show**  
23-27 May [www.rhs.org.uk/chelsea](http://www.rhs.org.uk/chelsea)

**The Landscape Show**  
24 May, Sandown, Melbourne  
[www.thelandscape.show.com.au](http://www.thelandscape.show.com.au)

**IPPS Aus Region Conference**  
24-27 May, Geelong, VIC  
[www.ipps.org.au](http://www.ipps.org.au)

### JUNE 23

**Bord Bia Bloom**  
1-5 Jun, Dublin, Ireland  
[www.bloominthepark.com](http://www.bloominthepark.com)

### Hort Connections

5-7 Jun, Adelaide  
[www.hortconnections.com.au](http://www.hortconnections.com.au)

### Mystery Creek Fieldays

14-17 Jun, Hamilton  
[www.fieldays.co.nz](http://www.fieldays.co.nz)

**Spoga+gafa Garden Trade Fair**  
18-20 Jun, Cologne, Germany  
[www.spogagafa.com](http://www.spogagafa.com)

### Glee

27-29 Jun, NEC, Birmingham, UK  
[www.gleebirmingham.com](http://www.gleebirmingham.com)

### JULY 23

**Queensland Garden Expo**  
7-9 Jul, Nambour [www.aih.org.au](http://www.aih.org.au)

### Cultivate'23

15-18 Jul, Columbus, Ohio, USA  
[www.americanhort.org](http://www.americanhort.org)

**Protected Cropping Conf**  
17-20 Jul, Brisbane  
[www.protectedcropping.net.au](http://www.protectedcropping.net.au)

### AUGUST

### Nursery Trade Day

9 Aug Claudelands Event Centre, Hamilton. [www.nursery.net.nz](http://www.nursery.net.nz)





In vertical farming plants are grown on shelves under LED lights

## First large-scale vertical farm gets under way in Hamilton

NEW ZEALAND'S first large-scale indoor vertical farm has begun operations in Hamilton.

The 6,200sq m facility at the Waikato Innovation Park will produce about 4,000 bags of leafy green vegetables a day for customers throughout the upper North Island.

They say this will be done in about half the time it would take to grow them outdoors and using only a fraction of the land and water normally required.

The company behind the venture, Greengrower, is being bankrolled by a group of investors with backgrounds in agribusiness and technology businesses.

When completed the facility will have three growing tunnels producing a mix of lettuce, spinach, rocket, kale, herbs and microgreens from plugs grown at the company's on-site nursery.

### Order of Merit for rose grower Lloyd Chapman

Lloyd Chapman, of specialist heritage rose nursery, Trinity Farm, of Otaki, was awarded a New Zealand Order of Merit for services to the community and heritage rose preservation in the New Year's Honours list this year.

He and his wife Ann established Trinity Farm in 1988. The 1.2ha property now also has a country garden open during Summer by arrangement and displaying more than 1000 heritage roses.



Lloyd Chapman

## Poor fruit quality made 2022 a tough year for kiwifruit

LAST YEAR was a tough one for the kiwifruit industry which faced a raft of issues affecting production.

"The challenges we have faced have been constant," said Zespri ceo Dan Matheson in the company's Kiwiflier Newsletter, "ranging from early season concerns that Covid-19 would prevent us from picking and packing our full 2022 crop, to geopolitical uncertainty, including the Russia/Ukraine conflict, ongoing pandemic-related global supply chain disruption, increasing costs and inflation, to poor fruit quality, and adverse weather events."

There have also been "sustained labour shortages."

### Incorrect practices

One outcome of all of this, made worse in some instances by "grower practices" with incorrect vine trunk girdling and inappropriate use of biostimulants, was a drop in kiwifruit quality resulting in a cost to Zespri of some \$500 million in early customer claims alone.

Initial forecasts for the last quarter of 2022 had put expected fruit loss in Europe at around 7%, but that was later revised up to 20%. The problems also meant the Japanese market was under-supplied to the tune of about one million trays this season.

Zespri says harvest and handling-related damage were the most significant contributing factors to poor fruit quality. Humid conditions in the early part of the growing season may have meant faster than normal fruit growth during the "skin sensitivity period" making the fruit softer and more susceptible to fruit rub during harvest and transport.

Dan Matheson said the quality issues had put "enormous pressure on our distributor and customer relationships."

He said a "huge amount of work" is being done across the industry "to identify changes we can make to improve quality both onshore and in the markets."

### Next season's crop likely to be down

The Kiwiflier Newsletter also noted that the total crop for next year could be 10 percent less than 2022.

"The warm wet Winter is likely to have contributed to variable budbreak and, combined with changeable wet and windy weather during pollination and the October frost event, is expected to result in reduced fruit volumes in 2023."

### 24 May for NZPPI Conference

The NZ Plant Producers Conference 2023 will be held on Wednesday May 24 at the Sudima Hotel near Auckland Airport. It will be a one-day conference

only with an awards dinner and trade displays. More details on the programme and speakers will be on the NZPPI website [www.nzppi.co.nz](http://www.nzppi.co.nz).



A little bit of water at your editor's home in Mt Eden . . .

## Industry proves resilient in the face of cyclone flooding

IT WILL be a long time before the night of Friday 27 January is forgotten by the good people of Auckland.

That was the night when, virtually without warning, the skies opened and a river of water reckoned to be 600 times what at any one time is in the mighty Waikato, came surging through town.

Everyone has a story to tell about that night, including your editor, who for a few hours had a free swimming pool installed in his backyard.

The storm of 27 January was essentially an Auckland affair, 249mm of rain falling within a few hours causing all kinds of damage, and some tragedies. But as most of the rest of the country, indeed the world, looked on and were thankful it wasn't happening to them, another even more vicious weather event was gathering in the tropics.

Cyclone Gabrielle, which made landfall in Northland around two weeks later, was also expected to be mainly an Auckland affair, but while it did cause mayhem there, that was nothing compared to the havoc and tragedies it brought to the Coromandel and Hawke's Bay.

So big was this cyclone that at one time its body covered virtually the whole of the North Island and part of the South.

We at Comm Hort had already written up the Auckland storm and were ready to go to Press, but the enormity of the damage in reports coming through from Gabrielle made us hold back to check on the garden industry further afield.

We thought we would find widespread damage to nurseries and garden centres everywhere from Gabrielle but that was not the case. With a few exceptions, most came through okay. We know there were some who were severely affected, especially in the Hawke's Bay. However, with communications being down even two weeks after the event, we were unable to contact them.

Here is what some of the others had to say:

### Hawke's Bay

Greenleaf Nurseries was in the thick of it in Hastings but escaped major damage, as **Daniel Sankey** explains:

"Thankfully we escaped the flooding. I was quite concerned obviously, on the Tuesday espe-

*continued overleaf*

## Natural predators and a new spray found for myrtle rust

WHILE MYRTLE rust continues to spread through both Australia and New Zealand, there are some promising advances and discoveries being made by researchers.

Recently, staff from the Forest Research Institute, Scion, in Rotorua announced they had found a second natural parasite that feeds on the rust.

Dr Michael Bartlett said a natural predator identified as a fungus of the *Sphaerellopsis* genus had been found on myrtle rust-infected ramarama (*Lophomyrtus bullata* and *obcordata*) and one of the climbing rātās (*Metrosideros diffusa*) in and around Taranaki and the Kaimai-Mamaku ranges.

Dr Bartlett said the fungus is widespread around the world and had probably "been here for a long time."

### Larvae of gall midges

It is the second natural predator found feeding on myrtle rust following the discovery in 2018 of larvae eating the rust on *Lophomyrtus* plants in the Rotorua area.

The larvae were identified as rust- and mildew-feeding gall midges from the genus *Mycodiplosis* that would have been feeding on other rusts prior to the arrival in New Zealand of myrtle rust in 2017.

Scion says it will require more research to determine how effective these two predators could be in the fight against myrtle rust.

Meanwhile, researchers at the

University of Queensland along with Department of Agriculture and Fisheries forest pathologists, announced in December they have developed an RNA-based spray which in trials significantly reduced myrtle rust symptoms on infected apple trees.

The spray induces RNA interference in the rust resulting in reduced spore germination and inhibiting the rust's ability to develop the specialised appressoria cells it uses to infect host plants and from which the minute 'infection pegs' grow that penetrate their leaves.

Molecular plant biologist Dr Anne Sawyer said the team wanted to find an alternative myrtle rust control to fungicides.

"We already knew that RNA interference works against other plant pests and pathogens, and our research found rusts are very amenable to this method when we sprayed the double-stranded RNA on to the plants."

### Early results positive

She said early results were very positive, and further research would test the spray in more uncontrolled conditions outside of the lab and glasshouse.

"Now that we've seen the proof of concept of RNAi in myrtle rust, there are a lot of possibilities for other rusts as well," Dr Sawyer said.

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## Industry resilient in flooding

*continued from previous page*

cially, then we managed to get to work on the Wednesday morning and the nursery was fine. I mean, the front drains were full but we didn't get any flooding like they did on the other side of the river or back towards Hastings. Napier was devastated.

"Generally Hastings, apart from some areas of destruction, escaped pretty lightly, but when you get across towards Napier and north of Napier, it's terrible. Just the force of the rivers.

"It's quite a busy time of year for us, with potting, staking, all the general nursery maintenance, but only the staff who live in Hastings can get to work here; the Napier ones can't get across the river. So that is going to put us behind and it's not cheap because we have to keep paying the wages.

"Thanks for enquiring. We have had a lot of customers from all over New Zealand enquiring as to how we are. So we are still a caring nation, which is good."

Also in the firing line was **Touchstone Garden Centre** in Gisborne, taken over recently by Lisa and Nik House.

"Our garden centre was fine," Lisa told Comm Hort. "Limited damage. Pretty lucky. But it's punishing on a business level. We got fpos back today (a week after the cyclone) but last week we just couldn't trade.

"Now the biggest thing for us is the water crisis here. We're managing at the moment to water our plants but we don't know for how long."

**Waimea Plant Laboratories'** tissue culture lab in Hastings (formerly Plant Propagation Laboratories) came through with no problems.

"Thank you for checking," said sales manager **Kate Marshall**.

"There were a few logistical issues with some staff who live in Napier and couldn't get home but fortunately their houses weren't affected and the lab itself wasn't affected, but a lot of our customers, some retailers and a lot of the growers we supply, have got a lot of damage."

Also unaffected, according to a staff member, was grafted grape vine, avocado and kiwifruit plant nursery, **Riversun Nursery** in Gisborne.

### Coromandel

"Thank you for thinking of us," said **Brett Gregory of Hahei Plants**, whose property is back a little from the coast near Hahei Beach on the Coromandel Peninsula.

"I guess everyone has got their tales of floods and slips and trees down and all that kind of thing. But, yes, it was pretty wild here on the Coromandel I'd have to say, blowing straight up the cliff here.

"But we're okay. We lost the covers off a couple of greenhouses. Big trees came down all over the neighbourhood but didn't fall on anything. Our nursery is kind of protected by the lie of the land and it has got quite major shelter.

"We haven't been able to get out of Hahei. We got power back on this morning (Thursday). The storm hit Monday-Tuesday. We didn't have phones on either, but that's all right.

"The whole of January/February has been a wash-out down here. There have only been two fine days. The weather has been as rough as guts. But it's given the fish a rest, there's that about it."

**Aeroview Garden Centre** in Thames was also okay.

"The water was lapping around the garden centre property," said **Paul Green**, but no damage whatsoever other than a few trees blown around."

### Bay of Plenty

Parts of the Bay of Plenty were hit hard. For a few days the only access into Whakatane was by helicopter but local nursery **Coastlands**, was largely unaffected.

"We were great," said staff member Wendy. "I think we were forecast to get a real battering but we dodged the bullet. It went past us pretty much and we just got rain, wind, and a few road clo-



*A tall shelterbelt down in a paddock near Henderson*

tures and some coastal surges but other than that we were sweet.

"The plants had all got blown over but we thought if the wind goes around to the south, they can pick themselves up!

"We are actually quite sheltered here by the hill before you go over to Ohope and the way the storm was tracking we were quite settled in here. We did close for a day and a bit, just for safety for everybody. But we are all back on now, full steam ahead. Keep our fingers crossed, no more storms; about time we had Summer."

### Northland

Up North, Whangarei and surrounding regions were hard hit.

"The centre of Whangarei got a bit flooded, as it usually does," said **Jill Upchurch** of plant label production company, **Orion Labelling Solutions**. "We get surge coming up the river coinciding with high tide.

"We had about a foot of water in our backyard (at home) but it drained away pretty quickly. We had huge old trees down everywhere in the park next to us. We were about a street away from the evacuation zone so we had our stuff ready to go.

"At work we closed for two days because most of our staff members live out of town and the roads were closed. We lost power for half a day at one stage but we were closed anyway. We had a bit of a minor flood in our office so we're sitting here now surrounded by heaters and dehumidifiers trying to dry things out."

Further north in Kerikeri, wholesale and retail nursery, **Kerikeri Plant Production**, came through with minor problems.

"We were okay, luckily," said **Irena Minogue**. "There was some damage to stock, but not as bad as we thought it could have been. So very thankful. I think more out towards the coast was where most of the damage was."

### Waikato

There were reports of extensive damage to properties through the Waikato but again nurseries seemed largely okay.

"We lost a couple of covers off structures but nothing too major, luckily," said a staff member at **Growing Spectrum**.

"One of the covers was on our gardenia tunnel house where we have all our gardenias so we had to move them somewhere else. Now we're just trying to track down some new plastic covers."

### Taranaki

The total area of Gabrielle was reckoned to be four times the size of New Zealand, so it was hardly

any wonder that its influence stretched right across the North Island.

At **Big Jim's Garden Centre** on State Highway 3, about 2km in from the coast near New Plymouth, **Linda Cook** said "Taranaki has been hammered." She closed the garden centre for a couple of days because of extreme weather and power cuts.

Further inland, near Lepperton, **Janica Amooore** of tree and shrub grower **Woodleigh Nursery** said, "yes, it certainly did reach over to us.

"We are used to strong winds but I think in our neighbourhood it got up to about 135km per hour so some of the plants are a bit battered and bruised. We did lose a plastic cover and a couple of wires in our shadehouse but otherwise the nursery stock is not too bad.

"The wind, not the rain, was very much the issue in the Taranaki. There have been quite a number of tree losses in the surrounding landscape."

More to the centre of the North Island, staff at **Plantlife Propagators** at Ashurst in the Manawatu said the nursery was pretty much unscathed, no damage to its buildings from the high winds, just some puddles from the rain "and we're used to that."

### The Auckland storm

The damage caused by the storm that hit Auckland two weeks before Gabrielle was caused by the massive rainfall, rather than wind, and most nurseries are set up to handle water.

The **NZPPI** rang around its members and ceo **Matt Dolan** said some had damage, but not that much.

"Our industry came through quite resilient and all the nurseries I talked to have been good.

"Most nurseries tend to be on

sloping ground or they've got good drainage and are used to getting rid of water."

Out in West Auckland **Mike Scott of Scott Base Nurseries** was "sweltering in the humidity" when Comm Hort rang a few days after the event but said the nursery had been "all good" during the flooding, "no problems.

"We are on a little bit of a slope so the water runs off in most places. Most of the low-lying parts of our nursery just have stock plants in them, so they were just getting a good drink."

### Plants gone into overdrive

**Waimea Plant Propagation** (formerly Lyndale) in Whenuapai said in their monthly newsletter at the start of February they had "managed to avoid any major losses with infrastructure, luckily being on a slight slope has been beneficial with all the rain.

"With the humidity, some plants have gone into overdrive, becoming ready sooner than expected. We are busy managing expectations on delivery and the dispatch team are fully engaged."

Further West in Oratia, **Paul Turner of Liner Plants** said "we had a lot of gravel moved around by the water but apart from that and a bit of a leak at the back of my office, there was nothing major." A couple of Paul's staff were away because of flooding at home.

"Yep, we were ok," said **Richard Beaumont of Ardmore Nurseries** in South Auckland, "just a bit of rain. Another day at the office!

"We've got good drainage and we didn't get the 250mm that other parts of Auckland got that day; we got about 140mm.

"But when you get that much water, fungal issues can be a bit of a problem and I guess an insect explosion can be expected."

**South Auckland farmers and vegetable growers** in Franklin, Karaka, Patumahoe and Pukekohe weren't so lucky. Pastures were under water, crops were destroyed and infrastructure was washed away.

**Federated Farmers' Alan Cole** said farms were completely smashed because of the sheer volume of water. "Some farms have

lost all of their culverts, there's a lot of fencing down and one dairy farm is under water so those cows had to be moved pretty quickly.

"It doesn't matter how big your infrastructure is; nothing was prepared for that amount of water."

**Pukekohe Vegetable Growers Association's Kirit Maken** told RNZ News the storm had left "one hell of a mess.

"There's water and soil everywhere it shouldn't be and some crops have moved down the road."

### Tonnes of onions swept away

One of those crops belonged to **Pukekohe grower Chris Nicholson**, who recorded 140mm of rain over four hours at his property on the Friday night. He had 10 tonnes of onions drying in rows on his fields when they were swept away and deposited on a neighbouring farmer's paddocks. Only some could be recovered.

Other growers reported damage to tractors and other vehicles, storage and implement sheds, and electrical processing equipment which had been under water for several hours.

One nursery in the heavily impacted Pukekohe area is **Joy Plants**, but they were unscathed.

"It didn't affect us at all," said **Terry Hatch**. "We've got a river that goes through the bottom of our place and we don't put anything near it.

"And it was good rain. I have never seen plants grow like they are now. We have got an order for stuff for April/May but, man, they're huge already."

"We've had to do this order in 8 litre buckets so there is obviously more fertiliser, more room and they are just growing so much quicker. I've never seen coprosmas grow like it. Beautiful and bushy, some lovely stuff."

### Retail okay but more customers wanted

"I'm just cleaning up some flood damage at the moment to be honest," said **Matthew Bailly**, the **new ceo of the Kings Plant Barn** group which operates seven garden centres through Auckland, when Comm Hort rang a few days after the Auckland storm.

"In general terms we feel like we dodged a bullet. We had three sites impacted but only one of them was what I would consider major.

"Takanini was the one where we had water to deal with but it's now under control, it has drained away so we're just working on getting back to fighting shape."

The Group's new mega store in Mt Wellington was also fine.

"No problems at all there. Obviously a very well-designed and engineered building to all modern standards."

*So you're up and running and everything's good . . .*

"For the most part. We've got staff who have been impacted more seriously and we are supporting them as best we can. Now we're just looking forward to some sunshine and more customers.

"I think people are very much focused on what is inside their houses right now but in a week or two might start thinking about what is outside that might need fixing."

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Artist's impression of the new entrance area

## Upgrade at Hamilton Gardens

**H**AMILTON GARDENS is part way through a \$12 million re-development programme featuring a new visitor entry precinct and four new gardens.

The gardens include the Ancient Egyptian Garden which opened in May 2022 and the Medieval, Pasifika and Baroque Gardens which are currently under development.

The new visitor entry area, set to be completed this year, includes an upgrade to the cafe, the addition of retail spaces, and various new and enhanced amenities including wi-fi, more bike racks, more toilets, a new PA system,

safety lighting and automated bollards.

When the upgrades are finished the Gardens are planning to introduce a \$10 charge to visitors aged over 16 who are not Hamilton residents.

Currently there are more than half a million visitors annually, a third of whom are thought to be local, a further third coming from around New Zealand and the remainder from overseas.

## After the boom, looks like a difficult year is looming

**A**NYONE HOPING 2023 was going to be a better year for the garden trade than 2022 might have to reserve their judgement for a while.

The year was barely out of nappies before horrendous weather drove even the most hardened of gardeners indoors and away from garden centres.

The spectre of inflation turned into reality as it became obvious to everyone that prices were rising everywhere and maybe it was time to start reining in spending.

The supply chain woes of 2022 and earlier were definitely easing and freight rates falling, but importers were saying goods already here and waiting to be sold had been brought in when those rates were sky high so consumers will still have to cop the higher costs for a while yet.

So what is in store for the trade for the rest of 2023? Comm Hort began by asking the ceo of the nursery industry body, **NZ Plant Producers, Matt Dolan**, for his take on the situation:

"It depends on the sector you're in," said Matt. "Native plants seem to be still going strong. They've got significant opportunities there with the Afforestation Programme and just the general demand for natives keeps going."

"The impact of the flooding in Northland and Auckland is significant. A lot of riparian planting has been damaged. It will be interesting to see whether they will re-plant those areas, or whether they will wait."

"You've got the horticulture sector – that was already coming off the boil, but when you've got a lot of damage to the new plantings in kiwifruit and other crops in the Bay of Plenty it will be interesting to see what happens there. And the vegetable crops in Auckland I guess will need to be replanted. So, an interesting time in horticulture."

"The greenlife sector is pretty stable. Houseplants have come off but garden plants are still maintaining their demand. And there are various reports about different parts of the retail sector having different levels of success or not; it's been patchy in that sector."

**Scott Bromwich**, sales manager of potting media manufacturer and general horticultural product supplier, **Daltons**, has cautionary words for 2023.

*"Things slowed before Christmas and they continue to be relatively slow this other side of Christmas and we are expecting this to continue throughout the year..."*

"I really don't know what will happen this year," he said, "but for us we noticed a significant slowdown heading into Christmas. We think the reasons have been twofold – one, people feeling rising prices and the cost of inflation and also, we got into a pattern where the weekends, in particular in the North Island, were not good for gardening."

"Things slowed before Christmas and they continue to be relatively slow this other side of Christmas and we are expecting this to continue throughout the year. It's not good but it is what it is. This weather pattern is not good for business. The weekends are not fine and sunny and good for gardening. People simply don't do it and unless you get some fine weather you don't make that ground up. It's the strangest Summer we have ever had."

"But it's tricky to make comparisons. This time last year Auckland was coming out of a lockdown and so we had a bit of a different situation, but certainly for us we have noticed a trending downwards of product purchase compared to the last two years, which were very good."

"Some of this is masked by the increase in value of items. Some

*continued overleaf*

## Tomato growers struggling even though prices are up

**A**LTHOUGH TOMATO prices at times have risen at retail more than 135% over the last three years, growers still aren't getting a sufficient return, says industry group Tomatoes NZ.

"Some are giving it up or switching crops," it says. "A quarter of our small and medium-scale growers have departed the industry."

"Factors include dark and cloudy weather, higher costs to heat greenhouses and get labour, and the shortage of carbon dioxide, put into greenhouses to help plants grow."

TomatoesNZ has put together a report outlining what it sees as the four biggest issues tomato growers are currently facing.

### Energy costs a major issue

Top of the list is energy cost. Most growers still use coal (cost-of which is up 45-65% in the last year) or gas (up 50% in the last two years) to heat their greenhouses. The report says very few can afford to convert to other, more sustainable fuels. "Pulling out crops and/or not heating are the alternatives which both reduce yield."

It is estimated it would cost \$220 million to fully de-carbonise all tomato covered crops in New Zealand.

Next major problem is increased cost of production. Some figures given include diesel up 40-50% over last year, materials like clips and seeds up 50%, and fertilisers up 175%.

Third problem is labour short-



Small growers are giving up

age. "All tomato growing businesses have been operating with 40-60% of their normal employees due to the effects of Covid and restricted borders," says the report.

"Many in the industry are having to work excessive hours for business survival which isn't sustainable."

### Biosecurity response costs are high

Fourth major problem is market disruption caused by biosecurity issues.

"When incursions happen, production costs are affected by lower yields, poor quality crop and closed international markets. This leads to the domestic market being flooded causing prices to significantly decrease."

The report says biosecurity responses over the last five years have cost tomato growers more than \$150,000 in levies.

To download the report see "Key Concerns of Tomato Growers" at [www.tomatoesnz.co.nz](http://www.tomatoesnz.co.nz)



Volunteers at one of Trees for Canterbury's planting days

## Trees for Canterbury expands

**N**OT-FOR-PROFIT NATIVE plant grower, Trees for Canterbury, has added another 3,000sq m to its existing 15,000sq m nursery in Ferrymead, Christchurch.

The nursery has been growing about 150,000 natives a year, gifting about 45,000 to community planting projects around Canterbury.

Manager Steve Bush told Stuff the extra production space should enable the nursery to increase the number of trees it gifts each year to 60,000 or 65,000 in a few years and ultimately to 100,000.

Trees for Canterbury was established in 1990 and says since then it has donated or planted more than a million trees.

Another two million have been obtained through the nursery for other projects and the public.

Part of its funding comes from tree sales through a retail area at its Ferrymead nursery.

Some of the 150,000 plants the nursery produces each year



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## A difficult year looming

*continued from previous page*

sales numbers might look okay but that is because the value of the items has gone up while the number of items sold has probably decreased in most categories.

“But we are optimistic that when times are tough and money is tight, people go back to growing their own so we suspect some parts of our business will be strong and others to be hard. I think there are some trying times to come, yes, absolutely.”

*What about in the amenity sector, the big planting projects that have been going on?*

“We really don’t get involved in those too much, other than with the nurseries, and that continues to be strong. The New Zealand native plantings and the

native nurseries continue to be areas that are going forward, but there might be some headwinds in that direction also.

“If we have a change of government there could possibly be a re-focusing of projects and the planting of trees. I don’t know if that will be continuing at the same rate it once was. I hope it does because it is a good thing for New Zealand, but who knows. I think there is a bit of re-prioritising going on, that is for sure.

“All I can say is that I think it is a cautionary scenario this year for everybody.”

### A nursery view

**Paul Clark, of Clarks Nursery** in Christchurch, has been in business for many years and seen it all before. Comm Hort asked him what he thought might be in store for this year.

“Des, I really don’t know. We’re finding things similar to previous years although we’re down a bit. Houseplants went ballistic a couple of years ago and that has been and gone and now they’re back to

the kind of level they would have been if we hadn’t had that artificial boost.”

*Do you think there’s a bit of nervousness in the industry right now about how things might be in the coming year?*

“No, I haven’t really seen or heard anything like that. What I do think, I suspect that there is over-supply, especially of lines that are produced from tissue culture, like ferns and things like that.

“The box stores seem to be absolutely inundated with plants and it is harder for small growers like us to get our products in.

They don’t have room.

“A lot of shrub growers got into doing houseplants because they were encouraged to do so by retailers.

“But they don’t have the knowledge to do their own propagating so everything they are growing is tissue cultured. It would be very easy to have an over-supply of tissue cultured plants because it is just as easy to get 1000 of a thing done as it is to get 100.

“We seem to be all right, but we have been doing this for a while. We have a good reputation, so we don’t have to show our plants to people.

“They are happy to just buy without seeing but I’d hate to be a new grower because it’s hard to get your foot in the door. I think the only future for new or young growers would be to sell their plants at farmers’ markets.

“Many of the big buyers only want to deal with two or three suppliers and they want people who can supply the whole country, so all their stores have got the same stuff. I think there is going to be a bit of a boring range in a few years.

“So, a bit pessimistic really – but that might just be a sign of my age . . .”

– D.S.

### News or Views?

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## Dairy company to subsidise tree planting on farms

**NEW ZEALAND** dairy products company, Open Country, is launching a subsidy scheme to encourage its farmer suppliers to plant more trees on their farms.

The project, to be run in conjunction with Nestlé, aims to encourage planting on unproductive land like steep areas, gullies, riparian areas, and wetlands.

For every native tree an Open Country farmer plants, the project will fund a second one, thus cutting the cost of plantings in half.

Participating farmers will be able to buy trees from local nurseries of their choice and be reimbursed by Open Country after their plantings have been verified later in the year.

The scheme will start with the planting season May to September this year. Up to 310,000 trees are expected to be planted in the first five years of the scheme and these plantings will be monitored for 20 years.

Open Country Chief Executive, Steve Koekemoer, says the scheme will boost the uptake of tree planting already under way in Open Country’s catchment areas where Nestlé’s dairy ingredients are sourced from.

It will help farmers reduce the costs of their planting, while also aiming to offset emissions, increase farm biodiversity, and reduce farm environment impacts, he said.

## Avid gardener takes over at Big Jim’s Garden Centre

**BIG JIM’S** Garden Centre, north of New Plymouth, changed hands in October when Vince Naus and wife Ann handed the reins over to new owner Linda Cook.

The Naus have run the garden centre for nearly 23 years. They started with a team of four, including themselves, building that team to 14 at the time of sale.

Now they plan to spend more time in the garden of their 10-acre home property.

New owner Linda Cook told Comm Hort she doesn’t come from a retail background, but is definitely an avid gardener.

“No, I’m from a gardening background, not retail. I’m actually a registered nurse, health and safety. But I’ve weeded gardens for Vince since I was 15; that’s how long I have known the previous owner.

“I’ve been coming to this store for decades, gardening all of my life. At 13 I joined the New Plymouth Succulent and Cactus Club.

“I’m a local, had my three children in Taranaki, nursed all my life in Taranaki. And when I’m

not nursing I’m gardening. I also worked at Duncan and Davies Nursery, so just years and years of gardening.”

*So you’ve got a pretty good garden at home?*

Apparently. I have kept digging up more and more of the lawn. I’m a very, very passionate gardener.”

*And how are you finding running a garden centre?*

“It’s great. I love it. Some of the staff I have worked with before. One of the girls here I worked with for

13 years when she was at the Council and I was at the Council and I’ve known some of the others from coming in here for such a long period of time.

“And I think what’s kept us up-right and allowed us to sleep at night has been the team. You can’t run a garden centre this size without having a dedicated and very committed and loyal team.”



Linda Cook



The Parnell Hotel is the venue for this year's Conference

## 2023 IPPS Conference set for Auckland on 20-23 April

**AFTER** A year’s hiatus, the IPPS New Zealand Region is holding its Annual Conference, “Navigating the Waves – Plotting your Course,” at the Parnell Hotel and Conference Centre in Auckland from April 20-23.

Jack Hobbs will officially open the Conference and also speak on plant breeding at the Auckland Botanic Gardens.

Other speakers confirmed to date include Dr Revel Drummond (Plant & Food Research) on gene editing, Ian Swan (Tawa Glen Nursery) on growing rhododendrons in coir, Chris Barnaby (Plant Variety Rights Office) on new requirements for protecting native plant varieties, Peter Brass (ex-Evendale Gardens) on life after retirement and Amy Clark (Kings Plant Barn) on her experience winning the 2022 Young Achiever competition.

Trip visits will include Zealandia Horticulture, Nga Rakau Nurseries, Waimea Plant Production, Blooming Hill Flowers and Auckland Botanic Gardens with others to be confirmed.

The all import social events will include dinner at a mystery venue with a nautical dress-up theme.

There will also be a post-Conference tour to the Matakana/Puhi area on April 24-25.

For further details and online registration see the IPPS website [www.nz.ipps.org](http://www.nz.ipps.org). For all other enquiries, contact Antony Toledo, [antony@multiflora.co.nz](mailto:antony@multiflora.co.nz)

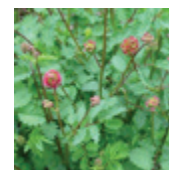
## Perennials to control orchard weeds

**PERENNIAL** HERBS and forage plants have been planted under apple trees in a Nelson orchard to see if they can grow to smother weeds and so reduce the need for herbicide sprays.

AgFirst, Willisbrook Orchard, NZ Apples & Pears and Plant & Food Research, are conducting the trial which began last October on Willisbrook Orchard at Brightwater with seven seed species planted under two 100 metre long rows of apple trees.

The species selected are sheep’s burnet, a deep-rooted perennial herb; bird’s-foot-trefoil, a member of the pea family;

plantain, a herb with a fibrous and coarse root system; strawberry clover, a perennial clover that performs well in hostile conditions; alyssum, a compact perennial flowering plant; chicory, a hardy perennial; and common yarrow, a flowering, low-growing plant.



Top: Bird’s-foot trefoil and, left, Sheep’s Burnett

## Rex Williams – clivia grower

**EXPERT** CLIVIA grower, Rex Williams, passed away in October aged 59.

“He was one of the best breeders of clivias in the country and earlier on was also a superb orchid grower,” says Terry Hatch of Joy Plants in Pukekohe.

Rex was a builder and landscaper and with wife Deidre over several years built a nursery and transformed a 2ha disused quarry site near Paeroa into a lush subtropical garden boasting more than 70 different palm species, 35 different cycads and a multitude of clivias mixed in among native trees.

Under the name Cosmic Clivias he sold clivia seed to collectors around the world.

“He also had a strong sense of aesthetics and quite often won awards in the photo contests run out of South Africa by the international Clivia Society,” says



Rex and Deidre Williams

plant breeder Dr Keith Hammett.

“I certainly knew Rex and had and have a high regard for him. I considered him to be probably the most refined breeder of clivias in the country. He was a very good horticulturist.”

Terry and Lindsey Hatch have taken over Rex’s collection of several thousand clivias and say they will be continuing his breeding programme.

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The Garden depot was originally Sang's Garden Centre

## Houses to replace the Garden Depot garden centre in Napier

THE GARDEN Depot garden centre in Napier closed in January.

Owner Stuart Lindsay told Hawkes Bay Today the lease on the land was going to get too expensive to stay, with declining business and struggle over Covid.

Ten small houses to cater to older people who want a small section are to be built on the site.

The garden centre was originally opened by Nell Sang in 1971 as Sang's Garden Centre. It later became Tamatea Greenworld, then The Garden Depot when Stuart Lindsay and business partner Adrian Woodhams, took over in 2016.

Nellie Sang told Hawkes Bay Today she was sad to hear the garden centre was closing. It had been the "first drive-in garden centre in Hawke's Bay."

She said she felt sorry for garden centres, who were seeing significantly less business now than they did when she ran one when gardening was a top leisure time activity.

"They have a different type of clientele, the people are only interested in putting a bit of colour into their garden and keeping it low maintenance," she said.

## Online spray advice software updated

THE NZ Plant Producers industry organisation says HortPlus and Plant & Food Research have upgraded the Weather and Plant Disease Management Platform it has been developing.

This online tool gives growers advice on ideal times for spraying based on MetWatch weather data.

The new update takes this a step further by giving them real-time spray management advice based on the actual sprays they use in their nursery, so is more precise.

Growers go into the Disease/Myrtle Rust Cumulative Risk section of the online tool, and from the 'Add Spray' dropdown menu, select the chemical sprays used

in their nursery.

The tool will then advise in graph form of the ideal spray periods based on these sprays and local weather conditions (wind, rainfall, chill factor, humidity, etc.).

The spray advice will differ depending on the spray they select from the list.

The platform and myrtle rust model are free for NZPPI members and, thanks to MPI funding, are free for other users until December 2023.



Jo Cave took over as CEO of Australian nursery industry body, Greenlife Industry Australia, back in January 2022. Now after a year in the role she is looking forward to a busy 2023 and a stronger more unified nursery industry.

She spoke to Comm Hort about her plans and challenges for the year ahead . . .

## Jo Cave, the new face of the Australian nursery industry

JO CAVE arrived at Greenlife Industry Australia in January 2022 as the world was reeling from Covid and the nursery industry was still transitioning away from the Nursery and Garden Industry Association.

"Although Greenlife has had a long history as a peak body, the break with the organisation that was the NGIA and the start of this new entity makes it all quite new," says Jo, who adds that the industry organisation is still finding its feet and getting better known.

"If you go round, as I have over these past few months, you quickly discover that Greenlife Australia isn't really well known."

"There needs to be a lot more clarity about how GIA's role as the national peak body complements state nursery industry groups."

She confirms that the reconciling the roles of the national and

state bodies has always been a difficult one with a blurry structure but it's a structure that she is very keen to work on.

"It is clear that the state associations are an important part of the family and we, as the national body, don't want to get in the way," she says. "Clarification is required."

"Right now, with the nursery and garden industry riding high as gardeners embrace the soil with productive gardening and ornamental plantings and have greened up their homes with indoor plants, is a very good time to be working out what roles the national and state bodies need to play.

### Who can join GIA?

There are several levels of membership of GIA, which is open to:

- Businesses and associations with a primary interest in the greenlife industry supply chain
- Affiliate organisations with an

aligned interest in the greenlife industry supply chain.

- Individuals including students, again, with an aligned interest in the greenlife industry supply chain.

For more info, contact Jolene Brown, Admin Coordinator, [info@greenlifeindustry.com.au](mailto:info@greenlifeindustry.com.au)



Jo Cave catching up with GIA members in WA – Leanne Leader from Grasstrees Australia, far left, and Nancy from Australian Native Plants Nursery, at the Kings Park Festival in Perth

"They are our most important stakeholders, and we need to communicate this. They don't want GIA getting in their way or duplicating activities, so I want to see the national organisation supporting and promoting what they do. I'd like the two tiers to operate as an extended family."

"Their expertise is membership services – we don't need to do that. The states want us to do the biosecurity and the levy, communicate with them and keep them in the loop."

"Our job as a peak body is to capitalise on our success and prioritise what we do next. At the moment we do too many things, so we need to get sharper and focus on our priorities," she concedes.

### Role of national body

For Jo, those priorities are national and include advocacy and influencing federal policy.

Activity in policy spaces that's relevant for Greenlife, such as issues around weeds, national biosecurity, water management, industrial relations, urban green-

ing and environment, are the items on Jo Cave's agenda.

"We need to be engaging with federal policy makers and making sure they think of us," says Jo, who plans to spend more time in Canberra lobbying for the interests of the nursery industry.

The head office of GIA will be relocated to Canberra in 2023 although most of the staff are scattered across the states and won't be gathered in a central office.

The national body is charged with managing biosecurity for the industry and managing the pot levy.

"We are nominated as the national response body for biosecurity issues. It's a highly technical role. No one else can do that. We are named in a legal instrument, and we need to put in more effort and energy in making that role known and understood so people appreciate its value more."

GIA is also the organisation responsible for safeguarding the pot levy. There's a lot of work to do there she confirms. "We have a role to ensure the levy is under-

stood, valued and resourced. It is work that's not widely acknowledged or understood."

Of the GIA's 10 staff, eight are dedicated to delivering levy-funded projects in the field.

"As a national organisation it is our role to bring all parts of the wider industry together," says Jo. Some of the ways she would like to see the industry come together include revitalising a national greenlife conference and re-establishing national awards.

She confirms that the call for a national conference is unified across the industry and is seen as an opportunity for coming together.

"There are other excellent conferences – such as Hort Connections – but they don't cater specifically for the nursery industry," she explains, promising the national conference will be back in 2024.

There are different opinions on the awards she notes. One area she's investigating is looking beyond Australia to see how local winners of any new national industry awards can funnel into existing international awards.

## The industry pot levy explained

The 'pot levy' is industry short-hand for the method of levying the nursery industry to raise funds for research, development, and marketing as well as plant health and biosecurity activities.

The levy is collected on the sale of pots and other containers used for propagation and growing plants. The levy is set at five per cent of the wholesale cost of the container and is collected when

"There's a whole supply chain in horticulture so we need to engage with allied services, educators, public and botanic gardens, media as well as nurseries."

"Our members and stakeholders no longer think of us just nursery, so we need to be more inclusive. We need to pay attention to food, fibre and foliage."

Jo Cave's work experience – 25 years as a CEO for peak industry bodies in both the UK and Australia – and her training as a qualified horticulturist and landscape designer with a love of gardening, puts her in a strong position to bring together the different strands of the greenlife industry.

She is also keen to connect with other sectors and organisations including fruit and vegetables.

"I am pleased to be given a leadership role that makes good use of my qualifications and interests," says Jo.

"The role is definitely challenging, as it is a highly complex environment, and I am facing the challenges of a small organisation with a big agenda and need to focus to add real value. It is a fabulous industry and I am proud to represent it."

the container is sold.

The funds levied are used primarily for research and development (which attracts a dollar-for-dollar government contribution) and for marketing. Projects funded by the levy include the collection of industry data and the marketing program 'Greener Spaces Better Places'. See more at 'Your Levy at Work' on the Greenlife Industry Australia website.

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Chandlers Nursery in Hobart has been family-run since 1888. Right: display stands in Chandlers' well-lit atrium building



*As Summer finally arrived along Australia's east coast and floodwaters gradually receded in inland Australia, it's falling property prices and rising interest rates that are back in the news.*

*In the garden trade, indoor plants and edibles are keeping Australian nursery sales buoyant though no longer at recent high levels.*

*Jennifer Stackhouse reports . . .*

## Inflation – today's big talking point

**R**ESearch COMMISSIONED by Aus Property Professionals reveals that almost seven out of 10 Australians (65 per cent of the general population) believe that 2023 is the wrong time to invest in property or buy a first home.

This finding coincides with the property market experiencing its greatest ever peak-to-trough fall of around 8.4 per cent after a string of unprecedented interest rate rises since May 2022, which has seen rates rise 300-basis points.

Rental markets also remain tough with a combination of high rents and a lack of properties to

rent – especially for families.

Adding to housing issues is the rate of inflation, which is making the weekly shop a costly business. The latest Consumer Price Index (CPI) data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, released in late January, showed headline CPI sequentially increased in the December 2022 quarter, largely as expected.

"While CPI rose 8.4 per cent year-on-year, there was a deceleration in increase in inflation, which is a sign we are nearing the peak and this should also provide a welcome breather for households," said Rabobank senior

**Snowball Bush was an unexpected favourite in Hobart this season**

food retail analyst **Michael Harvey**.

"Turning to food inflation, there was also a sequential increase in food inflation – rising to 9.2 per cent in December 2022 quarter vs previous year," he said, although the rate of increase did slow in food also.

"Nonetheless it is the highest rate of food inflation since September 2006. Since 2000, food inflation has only hit double-digits once. And again, it was broad-based with inflation recorded



Pic: Adobe Photo Stock

across all food and beverage categories," Michael Harvey said.

"The highest rate of inflation was recorded in cooking oils and is continuing to track at record levels."

Overall, in food (excluding beverages, alcohol beverages and food service) there were 15 categories of 26 that posted double-digit rates of inflation.

Across staple food items there were also record levels of inflation in milk, bread and snacks and confectionery. There was a slowdown in inflation in fresh produce including across both fruit and vegetables.

"For fresh produce more favourable growing conditions and less production disruption will be key to future pricing," Michael concluded.

### Retail sales down on the boom times

For those who do have a place to call home, gardening is still a priority particularly to provide fresh food for the family. **Lauren Chandler from Chandlers Nursery in Hobart** reports strong interest in gardening with good sales continuing through Summer, although figures have fallen from the boom times during Covid when they were recording their best-ever sales.

"Sales are probably back to pre-Covid levels now," says Lauren, who adds she is not concerned yet. Colder and wetter than normal Spring and early Summer contributed to slowed sales of both plants and dried goods – especially fertilisers and potting mixes.

"People are also more confident about travel and getting out and about and probably spending less time at home than they were."

If anything has stood out as selling well this Summer, Lauren says it is irrigation supplies.

"We can't keep up!" she exclaims. "Gardeners are wanting all sorts of things to keep their gardens watered especially timers while they go on holidays and to combat the increased temperatures now Summer has finally arrived."

Sales are also still very good in indoor plants and vegetables but there was a real slowing in sales

**Lauren Chandler from Chandlers Nursery in Hobart: indoor plant sales remain strong**

of ornamental and fruiting trees and roses she reports.

"Shrub sales seem to be fairly constant although this past Spring Viburnum opulus 'Sterile' went ballistic – people were really keen to plant the old-fashioned Snowball Bush," she comments.

"Also anything bee friendly continues to be popular including chamomile and alyssum."

Chandlers Nursery is one of Australia's longest running retail garden centres. The business began in 1888 and remains in family hands. Lauren has been involved with her family's garden centre for a decade and says she's noticed many changes in that time.

"There's probably three that really stand out for me," says Lauren, who lists them as 'Little Gem' magnolia, the amazing rise of indoor plants with a new genera-



tion of indoor gardeners, and the preference for organic products especially for pest and disease control.

### Indigenous nursery expands in Sydney

Sydney-based Aboriginal non-profit organisation **IndigiGrow** has opened a new wholesale native plant nursery that will give it room to grow its business and provide work experience for school students and apprenticeships for Aboriginal youth.

IndigiGrow specialises in producing native plants, including bush tucker and endangered local

species, for the landscaping and retail sectors. For its opening weekend it was also open to the public. The success of the open weekend has seen the group decide to open regularly to retail customers.

"Having this new nursery will allow us to scale up our operations significantly and grow many more plants to meet the demands of our industry customers," says CEO **Peter Cooley**.

"It's a way of getting more plant nurseries, landscape architects and tradespeople to consider replacing water-thirsty plants with

**Shoppers flocked to IndigiGrow native nursery in Sydney when the usually wholesale-only nursery opened to the public to promote its new site**



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Peter Cooley, right, with apprentice Jay Cook, left, and local MP Matt Thistlethwaite at the launch of the new nursery at Matraville

plants that better suit the Australian climate.

"We want to encourage people to beautify the grounds of their homes, apartment buildings, office buildings, parks and roundabouts with local native plants, which are so beautiful and easier to look after. We also hope this will encourage more wildlife and biodiversity corridors and pro-

mote sustainability."

The new nursery is the second nursery opened by IndigiGrow. It opened a retail nursery at La Perouse Public School and an online shop five years ago.

IndigiGrow is part of the umbrella business First Hand Solutions, which also runs a national indigenous art fair and a black market (for Aboriginal stallhold-

ers), with an aim to improve the lives of Aboriginal people and, importantly, re-establish links to Country. "This was a chance opportunity with unused space at the school becoming available to try new things.

"A plant nursery seemed a good idea for the students to learn about horticulture and the community to have jobs working on Country with traditional plants. This was the start of IndigiGrow," explains Peter. The new nursery is also in a school – nearby Matraville Sports High School.

Peter expects the wholesale nursery to initially supply up to 100,000 native plants a year for various projects across Sydney and the plant industry with that number swelling as capacity grows.

He estimates the projects would create a number of full-

**The Bush Lolly flower is incorporated in IndigiGrow's logo**

time job opportunities for Indigenous youth while bolstering security for its existing 11 employees, of which seven are full-time Aboriginal apprentices.

"All are connected to the local La Perouse community and working here creates a pathway to pass on cultural knowledge," Peter explains.

"We are also establishing native food farms on site, to encourage students to learn how to grow, harvest and use local edible plants. The native food farm is around 80m x 15m with plantings that include 100 lemon myrtles and 80 finger limes."

#### A special focus on the Bush Lolly

While he is passionate about all the plants they produce, for Peter



This year Mopoke had a 24-hour market that featured flowers and floral arrangements by leading floral artists

it is the hard-to-grow native species that take his focus, in particular a little berry called Five Corners or Bush Lolly (*Styphelia triflora*), an epacris relative.

The plant's flower is incorporated in the business's logo but has proved hard to propagate and grow. The berry forms during Autumn and Winter.

"My proudest moment will be when we have plants growing in local yards so that kids who hear their elders talking about picking and eating this sweet fruit can actually show the plant growing. That's our ultimate goal – it's not about money, it's about our culture and Country."

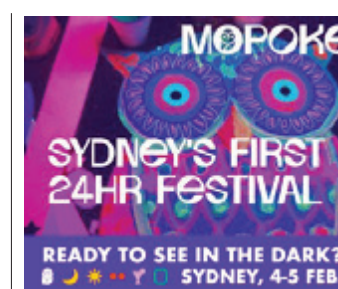
#### Growing more non-commercial species

Peter says he grew up hearing about the Bush Lolly but it was 50 years before he was able to taste the fruit even though there were still plants growing locally.

He would like to see the nursery industry concentrate more on hard-to-grow species. He realises the idea doesn't make good financial sense but says we need to grow these plants to complement the bland, easy species as it is necessary for Country, wildlife and biodiversity.

"We need all species, not just the ones that are commercially viable," he concludes. "And it will come back financially as no one else will be in that lane!"

He would also like to see the model he's developing with IndigiGrow rolled out across Australia as there are edible and endangered local plants that could be grown and sold by other communities who are also caring for Country.



#### Pop-up garden promotes native plants in Sydney

Native plants are in the news too with the creation of a temporary native garden outside The Mint in Sydney's CBD. The Mint, a colonial building that was originally known as the Rum Hospital and was headquarters for minting Australia's coins, is Sydney's oldest public building (built 1811-16).

The garden, which was part of the 24-hour Mopoke Festival in early February, featured plants from the local Gadigal land and included stories and legends about many of the plants on show.

The garden was backlit so it could be enjoyed at night when the area was also a venue for classical music concerts.

Festival organisers also installed a pop-up, 24-hour market that featured flowers, floral arrangements by leading floral artists, a three-metre-high floral owl and human-sized flower figures. The sculptures were created using both flowers and plants.

#### Manuka stoush

One contentious native Australia plant is manuka, a tea tree favoured by beekeepers as the honey produced from its pollen has special healing properties.

The use of the name manuka honey for Australia-produced



The popular Pink Lady apple variety was derived from the Lady Williams, a variety discovered in Western Australia 80 years ago

honey has been a subject of dispute between Australia and New Zealand with NZ claiming naming rights.

Australian manuka honey producers have scored a win over their trans-Tasman rivals after NZ producers backed out of legal action aimed at preventing them from using the descriptive word. The case was to be heard in the High Court in the UK.

Since 2016, a group of New Zealand manuka honey producers, The New Zealand Manuka Honey Appellation Society, has been attempting to block Australian honey producers from using the word 'manuka' in export markets around the world.

NZ producers claim the word is a Māori word, so should only apply to New Zealand honey. The plant, *Leptospermum scoparium*, grows in both Australia and New Zealand and the word manuka has been used in Australia from at least the 1930s to describe the plant.

Manuka honey from both coun-

tries is sold for hundreds of dollars a kilogram and is included in a range of medicinal products because of its anti-viral, anti-bacterial, and anti-inflammatory properties.

Australian manuka honey is used in lozenges, throat sprays, and eczema creams, as well as cosmetic products.

Australian Manuka Honey Association president Paul Callander said the legal victory would have significant benefits in the sizeable UK and EU markets.

**Editor's Note:** The NZ Mānuka Charitable Trust has subsequently announced it is filing a replacement application for name protection with the UK Intellectual Property Office.

#### A tribute to the 'Lady' of apples

Also with a substantial worldwide market is Australia's 'Pink Lady' apple.

This variety, now grown commercially around the world, descended from a chance seedling

## Pig gets into the Christmas spirit



**Remember Pig?** He's the mascot for Tim Pickles Garden Centre in Sydney.

He is normally seen sitting on a milk crate on the berm outside that store with a sign displaying a cheeky comment on a news item of the day.

Looks like he took time out in December though to get into the Christmas spirit on Father Christmas's knee. Go Pig!

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discovered 80 years ago on a farm in Western Australia.

The 'Lady Williams' apple was discovered by Maud Williams, who recognised it as a novel variety. 'Pink Lady' was later developed in WA by John Cripps, who crossed 'Lady Williams' and 'Golden Delicious'.

Maud Williams' agricultural find has been brought to attention during research on women's contributions to the agricultural sector by Susan Broomhall at Australian Catholic University. The history of Maud Williams and the apple named after her was gathered through interviews with Maud's family and members of her local community.

The apple tree that led to the development of new apples is at Boronia Farm near Donnybrook and is listed on the National Trust's register of significant trees.



Lisa Boyd, daughter of Seasol's founder, Eric Haynes, and Seasol CEO, Alick Osborne

### Seasol changes hands

The iconic Australian gardening company Seasol International announced in late December that it had been sold to Dulux Group and will become a division of Yates.

In making the announcement of the sale of her family company, Company Director Lisa Boyd said:

"Seasol has been my baby for



30 years and although it's always been my opinion that no one will look after your children as well as you do, your children then grow up and leave home!"

She says the sale was not an easy decision but will allow the company increased opportunities.

The seaweed-based product Seasol, which was the basis for the company, was developed by Lisa's father, Eric Haynes, 40 years ago.

In recent years the Seasol business has expanded to produce

fertilisers including Powerfeed (a fish-based fertiliser introduced in 2000), composts, potting mixes and a soil wetter. Seasol also recently acquired the Sharpshooter range of garden chemicals.

Its products are sold in the home garden market and in commercial horticulture in both Australia and New Zealand.

"I'm just so grateful that my father had the vision to buy a failing seaweed business – and persevere with it despite losing money for nearly 15 years – because it is now one of the most recognisable brands in the country!"

"We're a small giant who is considered unbeatable in the marketplace and with Yates and Dulux Group's backing we will be afforded increased opportunity and resources to grow even further."

The sale agreement is still subject to some final steps, including ACCC approval, but Lisa anticipates it will be complete by the end of March.



DPIRD research scientist Dr Lukasz Kotula with soil moisture and salinity monitoring equipment used in a research trial

## West Australia looks to use saline water for horticulture

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is researching the potential for using marginally saline water to irrigate horticulture crops.

This would unlock for use huge quantities of such water in underground aquifers throughout the State.

The department has begun trials using marginally saline water on tomato, capsicum, and rock melon crops at its South Perth research facility and is installing salinity measuring equipment on growers' properties to monitor the impact of salt on crop performance.

### Successfully used in many countries

Research scientist Dr Lukasz Kotula says there are large volumes of marginally saline groundwater with between 1000 and 3000 milligrams per litre of total dissolved solids that could potentially be available for horticulture.

"In many other countries in the world, water above 1000 mg/litre total dissolved solids is successfully used to irrigate crops."

Tomatoes are grown successfully in arid areas of China using water of about 3000mg/litre total dissolved solids and capsicums are grown in Israel with 1800mg/litre on sandy soil using appropriate irrigation management.

Dr Kotula says the WA research project will examine the optimal

irrigation type and frequency, soil moisture levels, mulch to reduce evaporation, time of year, and crop growth stage for saline water use.

### Drying out the main problem

"Applying additional water to leach salt from the crop's root zone is the major approach used to deal with irrigation using marginally saline water," he said.

"It is very important to not let the soil dry out, as salt will concentrate in the root zone, causing plant damage.

"Irrigation by drip, where the foliage is not wet, allows for irrigation with higher levels of saline water than overhead irrigation, where the leaves get wet and foliar salt burn occurs.

"The chemical composition of the irrigation water, particularly the chloride and sodium content, will also be a significant factor in determining plant growth and not just the total dissolved solids."

### Kay Pollard

Kay Pollard, who with husband Geoff purchased the Wodonga Plant Farm garden centre and nursery in 1981, and have run it as a family business ever since, passed away on 8 January.

## Renewed call for country of origin labelling for flowers

THE NATIONAL body representing Australia's flower growers and florists, Flower Industry Australia, is renewing its call for all flower imports into Australia to be required to carry country of origin labels.

At least half of the fresh-cut flowers sold in Australia are imported.

Legislation was passed in 2016 requiring most food products for retail sale in Australia to carry a country of origin label.

Flower Industry Australia chief executive, Anna Jabour, says "We did have assurances from the previous (Morrison) Federal government that flowers were going to

be added to country-of-origin labelling, so it was really a kick in the guts when they weren't.

"So we are making representations to the new government because we would like to see that decision reviewed."

She said the majority of flowers sold in Australia's major supermarkets are imported and invasive pests on those flowers pose a real risk.

## What's selling and what's gone quiet in Sydney garden retail

JAYNE HAMMOND, Marketing Manager from the Flower Power garden centre group in Sydney, says Summer trading encountered the usual weather-affected setbacks including heavy rain, storms, heat and humidity.

But "when the weather is on our side, sales are positive," she adds. Here is her what's hot and what's not summary:

### What's hot:

- Core gardeners are back into their gardens with sales of outdoor plants back on-trend.

- There's been strong interest in native plants for a while now in particular kangaroo paws, grevilleas and lillypillies.

- Exotics are also selling well (loads of interest in hydrangeas), but natives are the strongest plant category.

- Edibles – a good year for tomatoes. Citrus and fruit trees are much the same as Covid.

- Advanced succulents are still going strong.

- Olives are still strong as well.

- In keeping with outdoor plants, landscaping bulk products have seen strong growth, including, bulk garden mix, mulches, sandstone pavers and garden edging (for example CorTen).

- Turf is back on the radar now that turf farms have recovered from the floods.

### What's not:

- Indoor plants sales have slowed compared to Covid times.

- Likewise, indoor pot sales have slowed as well.

- There's no longer a big rush on indoor plant 'collectibles' such as Thai Constellation.

- Herb and veggie seedlings are constant, but less so than during Covid.

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The International Rose and Garden Expo, above left, was a highlight of the Convention. Above right: the bad weather helped the really good roses stand out at Adelaide's International Rose Trials, judged by delegates attending the Convention



WFRS Vice President for Australasia Doug Grant presents the World Rose Award to Fran Rawling. Above right: Veale Gardens on Adelaide's South Terrace featured mass plantings of roses



After seven years of planning and a few headaches caused by Covid, the 19th World Rose Convention was held in Adelaide, Australia, at the end of October. Hayden Foulds reports . . .

## Rosarians from 26 countries meet for World Convention

**T**WO HUNDRED and sixty rosarians from 26 countries attended but only seven from New Zealand.

Much of this was down to Covid – all the restrictions relating to travel were dropped only the week before the Convention. Numbers from many other countries were also down including from host country Australia. I guess it was a sign of the times we were in.

It was a credit to the organisers that they persevered with the or-

ganisation of this event after all that Covid threw at them.

But one thing they didn't have control over was the weather -- it was miserable. Cold, showery, windy days were the norm for the whole time in Adelaide with even the odd hail storm. Certainly much different to the warm, fine weather I have experienced on previous visits.

A meet and greet function at the Adelaide Town Hall was the first event of the Convention and it was great to meet up with people from all over the world, many of them I had not seen for at least six years.

The official opening was held the next day, complete with the playing of a didgeridoo and an explanation of how it is done. Not easy!

Also part of the opening ceremony was the unveiling of the name of the Convention Rose, 'Australian Beauty.' The latest roses voted into the Rose Hall of Fame were announced.

The well-known 'Flower Carpet Pink' was one of these and **Reinhardt Noack**, son of the late Weiner Noack who bred it, was on hand to receive a painting of the rose. Also present was **Anthony**



Anthony Tesselaar and Reinhardt Noack with the painting of Flower Carpet Pink, their rose inducted into the WFRS Hall of Fame

**Tesselaar** who has promoted the Flower Carpet roses around the world.

'Comte de Chambord' was voted into the Old Rose Hall of Fame.

Following lectures and lunch, we were off to **Cleland Wildlife Park** for the afternoon to see some of the local wildlife close up.

I spent the next morning in World Federation of Rose Societies meetings before attending the opening of the **Rose and Garden Expo** at the Adelaide Convention Centre.

The Expo featured the Australian National Rose Show, floral and trade displays plus a lecture program.

The Governor General of Australia, David Hurley and his wife Linda, also visited the show and were in attendance that night at the National Rose Society of Australia dinner where several awards were presented.

The bad weather meant that the trip for some to Kangaroo Island was cancelled but the one I chose to the Clare Valley went ahead.

The first stop was at **The Heritage Garden at Clare**, the garden of **Walter and Kay Duncan** which I had previously visited on trips in 2008 and 2014. Unfortunately, this time, around things were much wetter and the roses were not in full bloom, including those on the archways of 'Souvenir de

**Right: Kelvin and Melanie Trimper's garden contains more than 2000 roses, including a number of David Austin varieties, mixed with other garden plants**



Walter and Kay Duncan's garden at Clare features many heritage roses

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*The River Torrens Heritage Rose Garden features heritage type roses and has recently been upgraded*



*Rymill Park Rose Garden contains over 3000 rose plants and was established in 1960*

la Maimaison' which are a feature of the garden.

We then travelled to a local winery for tastings and then to Martindale Hall, a historic house that I have visited on a previous trip.

There were more lectures the next morning before we headed off to the Adelaide Botanic Garden for judging at the **International Rose Trials** there.

We judged the roses in groups of three with a local judge guiding us. Surprisingly, there were few disagreements, perhaps because the weather helped the really good roses stand out. After judging, we walked around the rose garden until the heavens opened yet again and sent us in search of cover.

We then travelled to **Carrick Hill**, a historic house and gardens located at the foot of the Adelaide Hills. After a walk around the

*The overall Gold Medal winner at the Adelaide Rose Trials was 'White Knockout' bred by Bill Radler (not available in New Zealand)*



grounds, which include a good collection of roses bred by **Alistair Clark**, the rose trial awards were held. There were some nice roses among the winners with the overall winner being 'White Knockout' bred by Bill Radler of the United States and entered by Meilland International. Both Meilland from France and Kordes did very well overall.

The next day yours truly and **Doug Grant** were up to make a presentation on New Zealand rose gardens and breeders, which was well received.

Following the rest of the morning lectures, the afternoon visits headed to local private rose gardens.

I visited the garden of **Kelvin and Melanie Trimper** which I had previously visited on trips in 2008 and 2014. The garden contains over 2000 roses of all types, although the Trimpers are scaling back in numbers. Unfortunately the weather was terrible and a hail storm did not help things either.

A full day visit to gardens in the Adelaide Hills was on the program for the penultimate day of the Convention. Yet again the weather was not the best with one visit having to be cancelled due to the conditions. The Adelaide Hills are a bit cooler and wetter than Adelaide itself and some of the gardens felt like we were back in New Zealand.

The first visit was to **Aldgate**

**Tree Farm** where the plantings included the likes of rhododendrons and one of the largest Wollemi pines I have seen in cultivation.

**Auchendarroch House** was our next stop where we also had lunch. The grounds were immaculate with large established trees, a collection of camellias and several beds of roses which looked great.

From there it was on to **Mandalay House and Garden**, a lush green oasis surrounded by farmland. Climbing roses growing around the tennis court were a feature of this garden.

The final visit was to **'The Cedars'** which is the estate of well-known Australian painter Sir Hans Heysen. Gardens containing many roses surround the historic house and studio.

The final day of the Convention saw a morning of lectures and then garden visits around Adelaide in the afternoon.

**Veale Gardens** was the first of these and since my last visit in 2014, have improved significantly with a great display of colour.

The next stop was **Rymill Park**, a garden I had been driven past on previous visits but never stopped at, so this was a first time garden for me. Again, the roses were looking good and the large blocks of colour caught the eye.

The final stop was the **River**



*Outgoing WFRS President Henriane de Brey of Belgium, left, and incoming WFRS President Diane vom Berg of Australia*

**Torrens Heritage Rose Garden** which was made up of terraces along the river planted with heritage roses and other garden plants.

The Gala Dinner was the final event of the Convention and a number of awards were announced, including to **Fran Rawling** QSM of Dunedin, who received the World Rose Award.

**Mrs Diane Vom Berg** of Australia was announced as the new President of the World Federation of Rose Societies while Fukuyama, Japan, will host the next World Rose Convention in 2025.

## Watering takes the drought tolerance out of trees

**RESEARCHERS** AT the University of California, Riverside, have found that drought-tolerant tree species lose their drought tolerance if regularly watered.

The researchers examined 30 species of trees growing in urban areas of Southern California stretching inland from the coast to the desert. They then compared those trees with the same species growing wild.

### Urban trees use more water

"We found that, particularly as you move toward the desert regions, the same species of urban trees use much more water than their natural counterparts, even trees considered drought-tolerant," said the study leader Peter Ibsen.

Species examined included eucalyptus, tree ficus, crepe myrtle, sweetgum, live oak, jacaranda, sycamore and Brazilian pepper trees.

The study found drought-tolerant trees in the wild often restrict their water use to protect themselves from drying out when temperatures rise. However, with the exception of ficus, it found irrigated trees in urban areas all increased their water intake when it was available.

"Generally, they're not conserving it," Peter Ibsen says. "Given the extra water, they will use it all."

Urban area trees in the study were also found to pull carbon from the atmosphere at generally higher rates than their wild

relatives. With more carbon, they also have a higher capacity for doing photosynthesis, and growing more leaves.

The study said it is unclear whether over-watered trees can regain their ability to thrive in drought conditions if the extra water is removed.

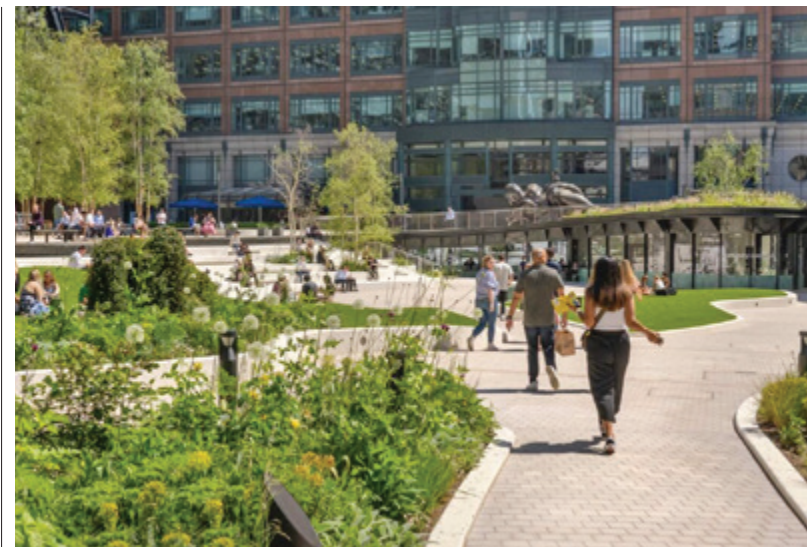
Also unclear is the specific amount of water people ought to give their trees in order for them to thrive while also retaining their drought-tolerance attributes. These issues are areas the researchers will be studying, going forward.

For now, Peter Ibsen recommends people interested in conserving water refrain from planting drought-tolerant species in places like irrigated lawns.

"If you're buying a tree that's meant to be drought tolerant, let it tolerate a drought," he says.

Editor's Note: To read the full study, Google "Royal Society irrigated urban trees", but you might find it heavy going.

For example, the opening sentence of the summary is "Urbanization creates novel ecosystems comprised of species assemblages and environments with no natural analogue," or again "The leaf economic spectrum describes the carbon-gain axis and is exemplified by the positive relationship between specific leaf area and leaf nitrogen concentration . . ."



*Exchange Square is London's largest pedestrian open space*

## Top landscape award goes to Exchange Square revamp

**LONDON-BASED** LANDSCAPE and civil engineering company, Maylim Ltd, has taken top honour in the UK's National Landscape Awards for its re-development work on Exchange Square, London's largest pedestrian open space.

The Square covers 5,000sq m and sits on a concrete slab suspended 10 metres above the underground Liverpool Street railway station.

The competition judges said: "This (Exchange Square) scheme is not only an exemplar of public realm landscaping excellence, fully deserving of the Grand Award, but also a lesson in finding and pursuing alternative solutions to the challenges faced by contractors who are replacing ex-

isting hard landscapes."

In the new design there are now four times as many plants as there were in the park previously, including fragrant fruit trees, tall grasses and weeping birches arranged to form a large amphitheatre and smaller nook areas.

Between 8am and 9am each day, a steel ribbon winding through the area releases a soft spray of water which "rolls over the topography of the Square much like a morning mist."

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One of the four nurseries operated by Brookdale

## Canadian big tree nursery named Grower of the Year

**B**ROOKDALE TREELAND Nurseries, a Canadian ornamentals grower, was named International Grower of the Year 2023 by the International Association of Horticultural Producers (AIPH) in January.

Brookdale is one of the largest and most respected growers of garden plants in Canada. They service garden retailers, landscape contractors, municipalities, and golf courses throughout Canada and the United States.

With four nurseries in Ontario and one in British Columbia, they have a land base of more than 800 acres.

Other winners in the AIPH international awards were:

### Young Plants

Gold: Morel Diffusion, France

Silver: SB Talee de Colombia  
Bronze: Xiamen Ican Seed, China

### Finished Plants & Trees

Gold: Brookdale Treeland, Canada  
Silver: Giorgio Tesi Group, Italy  
Bronze: Fructoplant SP, Poland

### Cut Flowers & Bulbs

Gold: Royal Base Corp, Taipei  
Silver: Zhejiang Toyoshima, China  
Bronze: Zentoo, the Netherlands

### Sustainability

Gold: Allensmore Nurseries, UK  
Silver: Xiamen Ican Seed, China  
Bronze: Brookdale Treeland, Canada

## Gene editing Bill closer to becoming law in the UK

**A**BILL LEGALISING precision plant breeding technologies, including gene editing, passed its third reading in the UK House of Commons in October and its second in the House of Lords in November.

The Government says the main aim of its Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill is to make a legal distinction between gene-edited products and genetically modified products, which would still not be permitted.

Gene editing does not involve the insertion of DNA from one organism in a species into another of a different species, but rather just manipulates characteristics already existing within an organism.

### Resistance from the public

While UK scientists in general are in favour of the new legislation, there is resistance from the public.

Legalising gene editing techniques would have significant advantages for plant breeders of all kinds. They say it would unlock opportunities to quickly develop crops that are more nutritious, more resilient to diseases and the

effects of climate change like drought and flooding, and less reliant on pesticides.

Consumers are still wary about use of gene editing techniques, especially with food products.

In a poll taken in November by YouGov, 79% of respondents said precision bred crops, animals, and foods, should be clearly labelled as such. At present under the Bill, food manufacturers would not be required to advertise that their products contain gene-edited ingredients.

Another concern was that the Bill would only apply to England, and so could present challenges in moving food across borders within the UK. Almost half of those polled (49%) said this was unacceptable.

43% said they were not confident the regulations would protect public health and 46% were sceptical about their ability to protect the environment.

## Penalties up for illegal tree felling

**H**ARSHER PENALTIES for cutting down trees illegally in Britain came into force in January 2023.

The penalties are designed to stop property owners happily going ahead with felling trees illegally in the knowledge that they won't suffer serious fines, which in the past have been limited to £2,500 or twice the value of the timber.

Under the new rules fines will be unlimited and failure to re-plant illegally felled trees following a court order could result in a prison sentence.

The Independent reports Forestry Commission chief executive, Richard Stanford, as saying: "These new powers will hit people where it hurts – in their wallets."

"By guaranteeing that illegal felling is no longer a financially viable option for offenders, these measures are a significant step forward in the fight against this offence and will help in our endeavours to fight the climate emergency and nature crisis."

## New Chief Executive for HTA

The UK's nursery industry body, the Horticultural Trades Association, has appointed Fran Barnes as its new Chief Executive Officer.

Fran was previously with the National Farmers' Union of Eng-

land and Wales where she has worked for more than ten years.

Fran Barnes



There were plenty of larger trees on display, from topiary to old trees rescued from orchards. Right and below: there were also plenty of options on display of machinery and equipment for handling and transplanting trees

## Sustainability was the name of the game at IPM Essen

**T**HE WORLD'S biggest horticultural trade show, IPM Essen, returned to that German city in January after a two-year Covid break.

This year there were 1,330 exhibitors (down from 1500 in 2020) from 46 countries, occupying 100,000 sq m of display space over eight halls.

Visitor numbers reached 40,000, again down on 2020 when there were 54,000. Media reports said "sustainability" was the hot topic of conversation around the booths, along with plant varieties that are more resistant and can be grown with less energy, shorter cultivation periods, and packaging materials that are more environmentally friendly.

### Easy to get lost

Sonja Cameron, from Australian wholesale perennial and potted colour grower, Cameron's Nursery in northwest Sydney, was at IPM Essen this year, and these were her impressions:

"Walking the halls of a big trade fair such as IPM Essen opens your eyes as the eight large halls covering 100,000sq metres are full of pure horticulture, making it so easy to lose yourself looking at plants, equipment, technology, packaging, labelling and anything related to our industry."

"Unfortunately, Australians and New Zealanders had to conquer expense and distance to get to Germany. The usual number

of Aussies and Kiwis attending was noticeably down this year.

"Also noted was the war in Ukraine and its effect on Europe, with inflation and power prices affecting businesses, especially with the freezing Winter they are experiencing. Hot topics, as in Australia, were climate change, footprint-calculating, carbon sequestering, recycling and biodiversity-saving solutions."

### Outstanding labels

"The one noticeable change from previous visits was the size and style of labels on display this year. In past years, little focus was on labelling, but now they are huge, and many have booklets telling the story about the plant. In some cases, the label was larger than the plant itself!

"Celebrating events is also important, with many European growers dedicating an entire facility to one crop and marketing it to the consumer with simple labelling and packaging."

### Big on plants

"Large trees, citrus and olives are always a feature at Essen. These magnificent specimens dwarf us in size and are very impressive. They are often rescued from old orchards or gardens and make beautiful specimens for gardeners. Even the smaller cit-



rus are grown inground and then potted for sale, providing fruiting plants for retailers to sell.

"Other bare-rooted products on display included topiary, espalier and hedging plants, all giving that instant effect on the landscape."

"And, of course, there were the plants, lots of them with every sector represented and none of the colourful displays disappointed."

"Transplanting larger trees needs the right equipment and

the halls had plenty of options to make the job easier.

"In addition, there were several halls just dedicated to equipment and technology. There is a toy for everyone at Essen, with a diverse offer enabling efficiencies and innovation for any nursery, from handheld devices to large equipment all on display."

"You could spend hours talking directly with their manufacturers and if you are worried about the language barrier, do not be concerned, as many speak English."

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Left: *Anthurium andreaum Anthfysan 'Delicata'* Centre: *Mad About Mangave 'Blazing Saddles'* Right: *Philodendron erubescens Pink Bikini*



Above left: *Chamelaucium 'Ever Flowering Wax'* Above right: *Primula polyantha hybrid Pollyanna 'Flame'*

Right: *Acer campestre 'Street Pillar'*

## New plant introductions win awards at IPM Essen

SIX AWARDS were made to new plant introductions at IPM Essen this year.

In the category Spring Bloomers German company Kientzler Jungpflanzen took the top award for its *Primula polyantha* hybrid Pollyanna series 'Flame', 'Frosty White' and 'Sunny Yellow'.

"As the first, filled-flowering stem primroses from meristem culture, they are true to variety," said the Judges. "Full and numerous flower stems guarantee a long flowering period."

In the category Flowering Houseplant the award was given to *Anthurium andreaum Anthfysan 'Delicata'* from Anthura of the Netherlands.

"The almost black-green foliage combined with the warm red of the flowers makes this anthurium something very special," said the judges.

The category Green Houseplant was won by the *Philodendron erubescens 'Pink Bikini'* from Ornamantex BV of the Netherlands.

The Woody Plants category was won by the *Acer campestre 'Street Pillar'* from Concept Plants BV of the Netherlands.

"In times of climate change, the field maple is one of the most interesting trees of the future," the

judges said. "The young foliage of 'Street Pillar' is brilliant green, changing to a deep, dark colour in Summer. The columnar growth is recommended for narrow streets, but also for private gardens as a house tree with climate character."

In the category Potted Plants the judges chose the Mangave, Mad about Mangave 'Blazing Saddles', from Gootjes-AllPlant BV also from the Netherlands.

"This plant meets all current requirements for a climate resilient plant. It is heat tolerant, tolerates intense sunlight and needs hardly any water. It shines with intense green foliage that appears to have red speckles."

In the cut flower category, the *Chamelaucium 'Ever Flowering Wax'* an Australian wax flower from Nir Nursery in Israel took the award.

"The 'Ever Flowering Wax' impresses with its almost year-round harvest time. This increases the cultivation value of this drought-tolerant variety, breaks harvest peaks and enables a continuous supply to the trade and thus to the consumer."



Staff spray painting poinsettias at Metrolina Greenhouses

## Painted poinsettias popular

SOME AMERICANS, tired of their poinsettias being boring old red, are turning to the painted alternatives now being offered by several nurseries.

One of country's biggest growers, Metrolina Greenhouses of North Carolina, spray-paints 40,000 of the one million poinsettias it produces each year for the Christmas market in an array of colours, with blues and purples being the most popular.



Painted poinsettia from Lakeside Greenhouses



SO Natural was producing 14 million orchids a year

## Big Dutch orchid grower quits because of high gas prices

ONE OF the world's largest orchid growers, SO Natural, says it will close, its assets being sold off over the next few years.

A family business started in the 1950s by Hendrik Smaal and taken over by his five sons in the 1990s, it was producing more than 14 million orchids a year for supermarkets and shops across Europe and showing nearly three million euros profit.

An investment company, Wattertoeren Hazerswoude, bought 80% of the company last year but says high and projected gas prices make the growing of orchids in Holland no longer possible. The company was employing around 200 staff.

## What's likely to come up in garden design this year?

EACH YEAR members of the UK's Society of Garden Designers make their predictions of what design trends they think will predominate over the coming 12 months.

A theme underlying most of the predictions for this year is the continuing and growing awareness by the public of the natural world resulting in a desire to create "sustainable and eco-friendly" gardens.

Greenhouses and kitchen gardens have been surging in popularity as people become more interested in growing their own food and the old time cottage garden is coming back, but remodelled for 2023 to be a functional working landscape as well as being aesthetic.

Lawns are also starting to be preferred instead of artificial

grass and the use of mulches is increasing.

Climate change and unpredictable weather patterns are driving a trend towards more use of drought-tolerant, tougher and more resilient plants and those that support and attract pollinators.

Garden colours for 2023 are predicted to be on the dark side, like darker hues of blues, purples and greys, combined in garden design with small bursts of brighter colours.

Materials will be taking on a darker shade too. One designer, Tommaso del Buono, says he has

**Designer Andrew Duff foresees a movement against artificial grass and a resurgence in the use of lawns**



## New Bergenia a star, says Jelitto

PICTURED HERE is *Bergenia cordifolia 'Snowtime'* a new introduction for 2023, bred by Jelitto Perennial Seeds of Germany.

An early Spring bloomer, it has snow-white flowers through early Summer and re-blooms in the Autumn with the same pure white flowers. Jelitto says its glossy green leathery mouse-ear shaped foliage is perfect for Autumn-Winter flower arrangements.



'Snowtime' thrives with good drainage and positioned in full to part sun. More shade is needed in hot Summer climates. It reaches 45cm tall while flowering and is super hardy."

For further information and sowing instructions see [www.jelitto.com](http://www.jelitto.com)



There is a trend to using more tough, drought-tolerant perennials and self-seeded annuals in home gardens, as shown in this gravel garden by Rosy Hardy



'Natural' swimming pools can serve both people, plants and wildlife. This one designed by Matthew Childs

seen an increased popularity in darker natural stones and says he will be using much richer, heavier hues for paving and other hard landscaping to add depth to his designs and create a dramatic foil for greenery.

In hard landscaping design, one designer, Matthew Childs, believes there will be a trend to-

wards gardens that are joyful, fun spaces where people, plants and wildlife can be mutually beneficial to each other.

A good example of this, he says, is the growth of chemical free, natural swimming ponds, like the one pictured here. "Fun for people and great watery habitats for wildlife," he says.

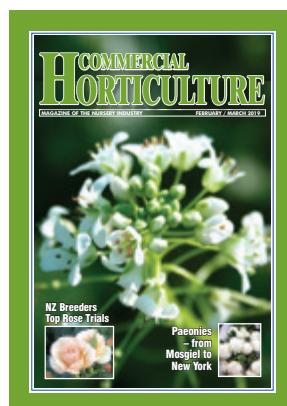


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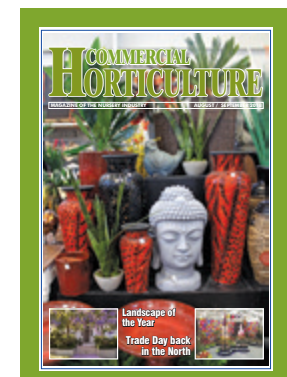




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## WORLD NEWS



*Bents is Destination GC of the year for the seventh time*

## GCA names its top 10 garden centres of excellence

**T**HE UK Garden Centre Association in January announced Klondyke Garden Centre in Morton Hall, Edinburgh, as its Garden Centre of the Year.

It named Bents Garden and Home in Cheshire as Destination GC of the Year, the seventh time Bents has won this award.

The GCA's top 10 Garden Centres of Excellence, which it announces in alphabetical, not ranking order, are:  
Barton Grange Garden Centre, Preston, Lancashire  
Bents Garden & Home Warrington, Cheshire  
Cowells Garden Centre Woolsington, Newcastle Upon Tyne  
Fron Goch Garden Centre Caerarfon, Gwynedd, Wales  
Gordale GC, Burton, Cheshire

Klondyke Garden Centre, Edinburgh  
Pacific Nurseries Aldridge, West Midlands  
Perrywood Garden Centre Tiptree, Essex  
Ruxley Manor Maidstone RD, Sidcup, Kent  
The Old Railway Line GC Three Cocks, Bercon, Powys.

To select its top garden centres the GCA makes unannounced inspections of its more than 200 member garden centres each year and allocates points for a range of elements. The total each garden centre scores determines its place on the ranking list.

## A little touch of vivipary

A Texas man got a shock when he went to eat a tomato he had bought two weeks earlier, only to find it looking a little creepy.

Some research showed what he was witnessing was a phenomenon called vivipary, where seeds prematurely germinate while still inside fresh fruit. The Gardening Know How website puts it this way:

"Seeds contain a hormone that represses the germination process. This is a necessity, as it keeps the seeds from

germinating when conditions aren't favourable and missing their shot to become plants.

"But sometimes that hormone runs out, like when a tomato sits around on the counter for too long. And sometimes the hormone can be tricked into thinking conditions are right, especially if the environment is warm and moist."

Vivipary is a Latin word for "live birth." It is common in certain varieties of tomatoes, peppers, apples, pears and some citrus.



*The glasshouse takes about four minutes to fully open. It houses plants that grow along what was once the Silk Road*

## Spectacular glasshouse can open its roof sepals

**A** NEW GLASSHOUSE feature has been added to the historic Woolbeding Gardens in West Sussex, run by the UK's National Trust.

It is the work of English architect Thomas Heatherwick. During colder weather, its ten steel "sepals" remain closed to protect the plants within; when it's warm, the sepals spectacularly slowly

open using a hydraulic mechanism to let in sunlight and ventilation.

The unusual structure houses examples of the flora of subtropical south-west China and sits at



the end of a series of gardens containing plants from 300 species which grow along what was once the Silk Road, a series of trade routes that for 1500 years linked the Mediterranean and Europe to China and Asia.

It takes about four minutes for the glasshouse to fully open in what is said to represent the cutting edge of technical design and engineering.

To see a video of the glasshouse opening, Google 'video captures heatherwick.'



## IGCA Congress set for September

**T**HIS YEAR'S International Garden Centre Congress (IGCA) is scheduled for Italy 24-30 September.

Along with short business sessions each day, Congress delegates will travel through Italy visiting places of interest, along with visits to horticultural supply companies and 10 garden centres.

A pre-Congress tour is available through Sicily, 21 to 24 September.

For more information and registration go to [www.igca2023.com/itinerary](http://www.igca2023.com/itinerary)



## Fire strikes home and garden store

This OBI home and garden department store in northwest Moscow is among many business properties that have been destroyed in Russia by suspicious fires in recent months, this one in early December.

Initial reports suggested the blaze may have been from arson. Subsequent reports suggested in-

stead an electrical fault as the more likely cause.

OBI, which is in the process of pulling out of Russia where it has had 27 super stores, is a German multinational home improvement retailing company, the largest DIY retailer in Europe and third-largest in the world after The Home Depot and Lowes.

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*Far left: Springvale Garden Centre is known for the wide range of plants it sells, many of which are produced from its own nearby growing-on production area, shown at left*

*Right: part of the Homestead Garden at Bason Botanic Gardens*

*Near the end of last year, members of the International Plant Propagators Society went on another of their field trips, this one to the Whanganui region. Hayden Foulds reports . . .*



*Below: the delphiniums at New Zealand Delphiniums were a highlight of the trip. The nursery produces mostly seed for sale to collectors in New Zealand and overseas*

## IPPS Field Trip puts the spotlight on Whanganui

**S**URPRISINGLY, CONSIDERING its long horticultural history, the Whanganui region has never to my knowledge hosted an IPPS event before. Hence, our visit late last year was long overdue.

The trip started off at the city's **Springvale Garden Centre**, where **Paul Carter** met us and gave us the history of the business.

The Carter family have run the garden centre since 1991 with a major modernising redevelopment occurring in 2010. A recent expansion has seen more crop

cover added to the retail area.

Springvale has a fantastic selection of plants and is one of the things it is known for. They also have a small growing area where they produce some lines.

Our next visit was to the **Bason Botanic Gardens**, a 25 hectare garden on the outskirts of Whanganui.

The land was bequest to the Council in 1966 by local farmer, Stanley Bason, who saw the future need for a botanical reserve. The Gardens are made up of eight areas ranging from an arboretum through to conservatories and a Homestead Garden. It is one of Whanganui's best kept secrets and one attraction we could have spent more time at.

After lunch at **New Zealand Delphiniums**, owner **Katrina Hindmarsh** took us on a tour of the nursery. The display of delphiniums there was a highlight of the trip and one of the reasons for holding a trip at this time of the year.

Katrina took over the business five years ago from Terry Dowdeswell and in recent times has rebranded from Dowdeswell Delphiniums to New Zealand Delphiniums,

mainly to stand out in export markets.

Coming from a non-horticultural background, running the nursery has been a big learning curve for Katrina but she pays tribute to the good staff she has on-board.

The nursery produces mostly seed for the New Zealand and overseas markets. Plant sales through the nursery's website make a small additional income.

### **Bushy Park an amazing place to visit**

The final visit of the day was to **Bushy Park Tarapurui**, an 89 hectare bush sanctuary. The forest here is protected by a predator-proof fence and the result is bush filled with abundant bird and plant life.

Among the birds reintroduced are the stitch birds or hihi which could be seen frequently visiting a feeding station set up in the trees. The bush is also home to one of the largest Northern Rata in New Zealand. An amazing place to visit.

The second day of the trip started with a short walk through **Gordon Park Scenic Reserve**, a small patch of lowland forest which once covered the local area.

From there, it was out to Fordell and **Paloma**, the gardens of Clive and Nicki Higgie. These contain a diverse range of plants from all over the world which also

shows how temperate the Whanganui climate is.

Of particular interest was the Garden of Death that is filled with plants that are poisonous, the Desert House and the Bamboo forest. Interspersed around the garden are various artworks by Clive and other artists.

Our final visit was to **Matthews Nurseries** where after lunch, we were taken on a tour by Bob, Cath and daughter Samantha Matthews.

A walk through the no-spray seedling trials gave us a glimpse of what is being considered for future release from Matthews' own breeding program and the

overseas breeders they represent in New Zealand.

We then headed to the crop of rose plants being grown in the field for 2023 Winter sales. Samantha gave us an impromptu budding demonstration as that is how all their roses are propagated.

The last two years have not been easy with the border closed meaning rather than rely on overseas budders; the Matthews have had to do it themselves

Thank you again to those places that opened up for the group and to everyone involved in the organisation of the trip.

*Below left: Samantha Matthews demonstrates budding at Matthews Nurseries. Below right: The Desert House at Paloma Gardens*



*Gordon Park Scenic Reserve is made up of some of the original forest cover of the Whanganui area*





Left: dahlias are currently in favour with Sydney florists for their large heads and incurved petals. Right: The lily crop is very uniform

# The Dominellos – legends of the cut flower industry

*The name Dominello is legendary among Australian cut flower growers. Bettina Gollnow visited the family farm at Peats Ridge 100km north of Sydney to find out why*

**S**HEER HARD work, attention to detail, lots of DIY, a sharp eye on market trends, thinking outside the box, learning from others and a sprinkling of serendipity are the hallmarks of flower growers Sam and Phil Dominello.

The brothers established S.D. & P.R. Dominello Pty Ltd (spdominello.com.au) in 1980. Located at Peats Ridge on the New South Wales Central Coast, 100km north of Sydney, the farm covers 38.5 hectares.

Sam and Phil both live on the

property, meaning the work never stops but they can

The trigger to grow flowers for profit was a desire both brothers shared as teenagers to have a mini bike! Their father helped them to grow poppies, and set up a win/win scenario, by allocating

the boys a new patch of soil on the family's Kenthurst farm. Keen to get the bike, they got to it and raised all but the final \$80 they needed.

Market gardening is in their DNA. It was how their grandparents established themselves in the Sydney basin after emigrating from southern Italy in 1933.

The family farm shifted multiple times as urban development pushed them further out before they wound up in Peats Ridge in the mid 1970s. Sam and Phil formed their business partnership in 1980, staying in Peats Ridge because of its favourable climate and soil, and strategic location close to a market of more than six million people.

Keen to move into greenhouse cut flower production, they bought land near their rented farm. Sam notes that they were going through a wet cycle for the first three years, so they reaped the benefits of that initial investment in undercover growing (serendipity number 1). By 1995 greenhouses covered a total of

3.6ha, all located on a gentle east-west downhill slope.

These days there are 12 full-time and casual workers. Half are family members. They do as much as possible themselves, whether this is growing, picking, selling, making compost and growing media, refurbishing greenhouses or making postharvest solutions.

Sam's role is Owner, Director and Chairman and all-round 'trouble shooter'. Phil is the other Owner and Director. Sister Vicki is Sales Manager and in charge of running operations at the Sydney Flower Market from the stands they own. Sam's wife Mandy is Office Manager and Financial Controller and her skills got them through tough times. Phil's wife Roseanne keeps busy in the packing shed.

## Big changes in production after 30 years

Driving to the farm to interview Sam and Phil, I realised that it was 30 years since I first visited their property. At first glance, the farm looked much the same as my last visit many years before, but I quickly learnt that there has been a radical shift in how the brothers grow their flower crops and run their business.

The greenhouses they built at the start using Australian steel remain in good condition. The structures are relatively simple with plastic covers, fans and vents. Heating, thermal screens and blackout curtains have been added over time.

Today, there are no outdoor

crops and indoors more than half the production area is heated for four months of the year to extend production. Hot water pipes run parallel to the irrigation lines. The water is heated using two thermostat-controlled, coal-fired boilers positioned in different locations on the farm. The brothers say it is the only affordable option.

The second instance of serendipity in this story was a chance conversation with an award-winning pumpkin grower. His massive pumpkin beat the boys' entry in a local pumpkin-growing competition. His secret he confided was worm castings and 'worm juice'.

This revelation led the Dominellos to explore the benefits of adding beneficial micro-organisms to their production system. Initially they worked with a microbiologist to develop a 'brew' of beneficial bacteria and fungi but soon turned to vermitea or 'worm juice', which they say provides the same benefits with less work.

The earthworm beds they have built are irrigated and the resulting liquid, the vermitea, is gravity fed into a large holding tank and circulated back through the worm beds daily to build up the population of beneficial organisms.

*The vermitea is gravity fed into a large holding tank and circulated back through the worm beds daily to build up the population of beneficial organisms . . .*

After about a month, the vermitea is moved to a second holding tank ready to be applied to the crops. There is also a side income selling vermitea to other flower growers and local orchardists.

Diluted vermitea is applied to the crop throughout its life and Sam firmly believes this is the reason for their high-quality flowers. While it isn't high in NPK, Sam understands that the microbes in vermitea convert nutrients in the growing media into a form the plants can take up, meaning they need to apply less fertiliser. Vermitea also includes trace elements and plant growth enhancers such as cytokinins.

Applied through overhead irrigation, the vermitea runs down leaves and petals and further boosts the microbes in the growing media. It promotes plant growth and yield and, as their leaves are so thick and healthy the plants better withstand pests and diseases.

Originally adopted to improve the quality of their flowers (longer stems, great colour in the buds and lush, crisp foliage), the brothers estimate the vermitea saves them tens of thousands of dollars in fertilisers and farm chemicals. Their worm farm featured in a segment called 'A Drop of the

Good Stuff' by Angus Stewart on the ABC's Gardening Australia, which won an award for its educational content.

The Dominellos were also early adopters of fertigation using Israeli units and over time have improved their system so it is



Lily bunches in buckets of water on a trolley in the cool room. The trolleys are loaded on to a refrigerated truck for transport to market



Powerhouse of the nursery – the Dominellos established this commercial-scale worm farm of 14 raised beds about 15 years ago and say the vermitea produced now saves them tens of thousands of dollars in fertilisers and farm chemicals

now fully automated. Water is sourced from dams and a creek line runs through the property.

They also have bores and this water is used for the lisianthus crops and postharvest solutions. Taps are turned on and off with a pulse of air, which means irrigation is unaffected by the natural fall of the land.

The system also uses air to agitate three fertigation tanks, which are high potassium, high calcium, and the vermitea. This agitation is gentle so doesn't harm the beneficial organisms in the vermitea.

The Dominello's flower crops are grown in black plastic lily

crates or raised beds of soil. The major crop is lilies, as it has been for the past 20 years, as they grow 52 weeks of the year. Their farm is a registered quarantine facility as they import Dutch bulbs for six months of the year, sourcing bulbs from Tasmanian growers for the rest of the year.

Their other main crops are dahlias and lisianthus. Dahlias are grown all year round, but these are not an easy crop, requiring pruning and the expense of thermal screens and heating to produce out-of-season flowers. Other seasonal flowers that expand the mix include stock, delphinium, gypsophila and alstroemeria.

The mobile steaming unit – steam disinfection of media allows the next crop to be planted as soon as the mix has cooled, whereas fumigation with chemicals requires a four to six week wait





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## FEATURE NURSERY

“We grow what sells, not what we like so much,” explain the brothers, who know exactly what’s selling and what isn’t. They adapt their production in terms of flower lines and also varieties and colours.

### Steam treatment and pest control

Another major change has been a swing away from chemical fumigants to disinfect growing media between crops. When their previous approach of crop rotation, herbicides and fumigants to disinfect the soil started to fail, they turned to steam.

When a crop is finished, the brothers rejuvenate the growing medium, adding fresh compost, before steaming it either in a large bunker or in mobile steaming units.

Steam allows the next crop to be planted quickly, as soon as the mix has cooled, whereas fumigation with chemicals requires a four to six week wait before replanting. Steam sterilisation tends to kill pathogens and beneficials alike but the vermitea quickly adds beneficials back into the system.

With crop protection key to maximising profit, steam disinfection of media together with vermitea have reduced the need to use chemicals, especially herbicides, saving time and money.

### Labour-saving tip

Flower growing is very labour intensive with limited opportunities to mechanise but one of the Dominellos’ innovations allows them to fill flower crates with fresh media for the next crop very quickly.

They’ve built a trailer that is driven over the crates, so in just two hours two workers can now fill the crates in a 550sq m greenhouse ready to plant.

It used to take four workers a whole day to do this with shovels. This is a critical saving when you plant 20,000 lilies each week.

Experience with growing many different flowers over the years has steered the brothers away from many pest-prone crops. Lilies are the ultimate as the relatively short (12 week) production cycle limits exposure of the crop to pests, though diseases do remain an issue.

IPM is important in the growing areas. When New South Wales Department of Primary Industries formed a grower group in 2003 aimed at helping flower growers to adopt integrated pest management (IPM) programs on their farms, Sam joined and completed the IPM training course offered.

He learnt the importance of scouting crops, using sticky traps to monitor for pests and how to integrate beneficial insects and complementary chemicals into the production system.

He says being part of the group taught him the difference between hard and soft chemicals, and he now uses the soft approach rather than going in with “guns blazing.” Sticky traps are used to monitor insect populations, especially in lisianthus.

### Beating imports

Sam and Phil haven’t forgotten the hard years of 2010-2020 when imported flowers, especially roses, flooded the market. “We were just treading water,” recalls Sam, “but thankfully we survived as a family business.”

With roses the number one line, their imports had a flow-on effect, lowering all flower prices. Like many other growers in the Sydney Flower Market the Dominellos also used to wholesale flowers from other growers on their stand. But eight years ago as others in the market swung further towards wholesaling and importing flowers as an easier way of making an income, Sam and Phil reverted to selling only their own flowers. Their stand in the flower market stood out as different, attracting buyers.

Then came the transformational year of 2020 – and more serendipity. Because of Covid-19 flower imports basically ceased and the market was empty. Suddenly selling only their own production was a huge advantage. Sam and Phil quickly planted crops that were in demand. The unexpected bonus was record prices. Locally grown flowers are now more competitive than they used to be. More florists and consumers want locally grown flowers and the past two years have been fantastic say the brothers.

The Dominellos enjoy learning



*Dominello stand at the busy Sydney Flower Market*

new things from others in the industry and late last year Sam and wife Mandy were looking forward to a study tour of Japan, visiting lisianthus and dahlia growers to exchange knowledge. Sam says he learns best from visiting other growers and sharing techniques with them.

Sam is on the board of the Central Coast Plateau Chamber of Commerce, which is working hard to help farmers and protect the region into the future. He sees a bright future for new people joining the industry, especially in protected cropping.

“There is a big future here, growing flowers, herbs and food crops,” he says.

“Protected cropping is win, win – less water, less chemicals, more first grade production. The big issue is whether or not local councils understand protected crop-

ping and allow developments to go ahead.”

Sam is also looking forward to helping his daughter with her new business, a wedding venue being set up on the property – The Ridge Estate. Additional land nearby has also been purchased to be developed for agriworker and tourist accommodation.

Phil plans to continue flower growing and his kids are now the fourth generation involved in the business.

### About the author

Bettina Gollnow is Communications & Extension Manager for WildFlowers Australia, the industry’s national Association focused on producing Australian and closely related South African species for the floristry industry. She has also just published the 2nd edition of “What Cut Flower is That? The essential care and handling guide for cut flower professionals”, with co-author Delwyn Thomas.

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## THE PHYSICAL STORE, AND THE ABILITY TO SEE AND TRIAL PRODUCTS, WAS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL SOURCE FOR PURCHASE DECISIONS OVERALL



This chart shows what factors most influence consumers' buying decisions

## Customers are coming back to bricks and mortar

RESEARCH FROM the Australian Consumer and Retail Studies Unit (ACRS) in the Monash Business School, Victoria, shows bricks and mortar is back with physical shopping returning to pre-pandemic levels.

"Research shows that the ability to see, touch and trial goods is the most influential factor of purchase decisions, and when it comes to tactile products such as apparel and household goods, factors such as size, fit and quality are paramount, but difficult to judge online," says Dr Zoppos, Principal Research Consultant at the ACRS.

Traditional bricks and mortar retail stores have seen a resurgence in popularity post-pandemic, as many Australians prefer to shop in-store across most product categories, including apparel, personal care, and house-



hold goods.

This trend is likely due to a combination of factors, including increased consumer comfort with in-store shopping as pandemic-related restrictions eased, as well as a desire for the tactile shopping experience that online retailers cannot replicate.

Garden centres have always been a popular destination for

shoppers looking for plants, gardening supplies, and outdoor decor. However, the pandemic accelerated the shift towards online shopping for these products, as many consumers had been hesitant to visit physical stores.

There is no doubt that garden centre customers still prefer to purchase in-store. The ability to see and touch plants has a big influence on a purchase, as even within the same pot size, plants can vary significantly in size and quality.

How often have you, as a garden retailer, been asked to choose the 'best one' for a customer?

With many garden centres now selling clothing, kitchenware, and gifts the ACRS findings are particularly relevant.

Although garden centres are not mentioned specifically in this research it does raise significant questions for this sector in New Zealand and Australia regarding the in-store experience and how much to invest in an online presence.

Having had their shopping experiences influenced by online shopping during prolonged lockdowns it seems customers now have a heightened expectation of the in-store experience.

Many garden centres are also facing increased competition from big-box retailers and home improvement stores, which have also increased their focus on gardening and outdoor products.

There are several ways garden

*There is no doubt that garden centre customers still prefer to purchase in-store. The ability to see and touch plants has a big influence on a purchase, as even within the same pot size, plants can vary significantly in size and quality . . .*

centres can adapt to the changing landscape by offering new and innovative ways for customers to shop and encourage in-store purchases:

### Provide knowledgeable and helpful staff

Garden centres should ensure that their staff are knowledgeable about the products they are selling and can provide helpful advice to customers.

### Create an attractive and organised store layout

Garden centres should make sure that their stores are visually appealing and easy to navigate. This can make shopping more enjoyable for customers and make it easier for them to find what they are looking for.

### Offer specials

Garden centres can offer special promotions or discounts to encourage customers to make purchases.

### Provide additional services

Garden centres can offer additional services such as delivery and installation to make it more convenient for customers to purchase products.

### Encourage customer feedback

Garden centres should encourage customers to provide feedback on their experiences and act on any suggestions they receive.

### Make it easy to purchase

Garden centres can make it easy for customers to purchase items by making the checkout process quick and efficient.

### Promote online

Have a good online presence through the website and social media to connect with customers and share your latest products and promotions.

The ACRS research also ranked the most influential reasons customers used to make their purchasing decisions. The physical store and the ability to see and trial products topped the list for Australians (see image).

The pandemic has made customers more comfortable moving seamlessly between the offline and online worlds than ever before.

During the pandemic many garden centres introduced online ordering and contactless pickup options. There was also a discernible increase in the use of social media to interact with customers. It is worth noting that social media is well down the list of factors influencing customers' purchase decisions.

This does not mean that it should be ignored but ought to be taken into account when allocating resources for the best possible return from your human and financial assets. What is important, is a good and easily navigated website that is effectively optimised for internet searches.

### Have a clear returns policy

Another finding uncovered in the ACRS report is the increasing importance and prevalence of retail returns. According to the report over half of consumers (58 per cent) say return options are one of the most important factors when making a purchase, only coming in behind price-related factors, and quality and customer service. And well over a third of Australian shoppers (72 per cent) said they've returned an item they purchased from a physical or online store.

"Rather than see returns as a problem, retailers should look at returns as an important stage of the customer journey; one that when done right, can result in customer loyalty, advocacy, and a cycle back to the purchasing stage of the customer retail journey," says Dr Zoppos.

A return policy can have a considerable influence on customers'

shopping habits. If it is generous, such as allowing customers to return items without a receipt or within a long timeframe, it can make customers feel more confident in their purchase and may encourage them to shop more frequently or spend more money.

On the other hand, a strict return policy may discourage customers from making purchases,

as they may be hesitant to buy something that they cannot return or exchange easily.

Additionally, if a return policy is difficult or confusing to understand, it may also discourage customers from making a purchase. Overall, a clear and generous return policy can be a powerful tool for encouraging customer loyalty and boosting sales.

At a time when many garden centres are facing increased competition from big-box retailers, home improvement stores, and an increasing number of online shops, it is heartening to see that the majority of customers still prefer to shop in person and that garden centres still have the capacity to capitalise on the factors that are influencing their purchasing decisions.

## It's much the same, but a little different, in the USA

IN THE USA, research shows post-pandemic behaviour by consumers is similar to that in Australia and New Zealand, but there are some differences as well.

It notes that many people who for the first time started buying from garden retailers online during Covid lockdowns, will keep buying online now that the pandemic has passed and while many others will return to bricks and mortar shopping it will only be after researching a store's website first.

Garden retailers need to be aware of, and prepared for, these new 'hybrid shoppers' says American plant pot and container manufacturer, HC-Companies, who offer the following advice in a blog on their website . . .

"The pandemic has re-shaped how consumers shop.

"At first, it was merely out of necessity based on the unforeseen circumstances of quarantines and lockdowns. But as restrictions eased and time passed, these newly adopted shopping trends have transformed the behaviours of today's shoppers into the foreseeable future, and retailers must take notice."

### Hybrid shoppers

"According to a 2022 Shopper Experience Index study, shoppers who started purchasing online in 2020 and 2021 are most likely to remain there. But a new breed of shopper is entering the arena – one that relies on online product research to guide their decisions before venturing back to brick-and-mortar stores. This new methodology is known as 'hybrid shopping'.

"An article posted on Forbes.com echoes this new breed of

shopper. 'Even if shoppers make their purchase in-store, they will have researched that product online first' – another habit seen during the pandemic that is here to stay."

### Brand loyalty

"Consumer loyalty to one particular brand has also changed due to the pandemic. With shortages and shipping delays widespread throughout many global industries, consumers became more willing to cross-shop other brands when the products they were initially looking for were not readily available.

"Therefore, brands must keep up to date with how consumers shop today and put dedicated marketing plans in place to reach and retain them."

### Online reviews

"Online reviews are more vital than ever as shoppers become their salespeople in an e-commerce environment. In some cases, this could very well be the

most effective content required to secure a purchase. Legitimate reviews speak to quality, value, purpose, and even customer service to an audience looking for something to help encourage their purchasing decision.

"Be aware that having nothing but positive reviews for a product or a perfect "5-star" rating leads consumers to question an organization's authenticity, as negative reviews can be just as beneficial as the positive ones – helping an organisation see where they can improve."

### Social media inspiration

"According to the Shopping Experience Index, '69% of shoppers have been inspired by social media to purchase through another channel, with ease as the top reason for doing so.'

"Therefore, businesses must ensure they're capturing customers' attention on the appropriate social channels while enabling the buying process to continue seamlessly and painlessly from the social platform.

"The pandemic has reminded retailers never to make assumptions about how consumers shop, especially after circumstances that have entirely altered their normalcy."

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As much as we would love to think our beech trees survived the journey from the split from Gondwana, they did not. It is now thought they only made it to our fair shores 30 million years ago. The tawhairaunui (*Fuscospora fusca*) pictured above left was planted at Larnach Castle by Larnach himself and is lovely to have within the grounds of Larnach Castle. He was incredible as an early settler in his desire to have NZ natives within his landscape



Left: our most prolific genera, our hebes, (around a 100 species and subspecies) originated from the other side of the world!

I don't not even bother trying to identify the different ones any more – there are so many cultivars and people are wont to just give them the name they think they are, rather than fully checking to see if it is correct.

The one pictured here is *Hebe bishopiana* and I love it. It grows well in light shade and happily cascades down walls. This has happily been growing at Larnach Castle since I started working there; it was one of the trailer load of natives I brought with me!

## How our plants made it to NZ – and why we celebrate New Year

HERE WE are in 2023, well for me the first month is nearly over and for you lot well, Summer will be coming to a close.

For many of you up north it was the Summer you will never want to repeat in your lifetime. Unfortunately, but fortunately for us, we in the Deep South have had one of our better summers, our high blocking the movement of your devastating aerial river of water.

We were probably all hoping that this year would bring something a little different and, hopefully, on the better side of the ledger rather than on the negative. As I sit here, having survived the first month, it seems quite a



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bit like it is, well, just the same as last year for me.

On pondering, I was wondering why we think a new year it will be any different to the old. Humans throughout the world celebrate it though; that passage of time from the end of one year to the beginning of the next. There must be something about it that satisfies

a part of who we are. This is regardless of culture, religion or simply, where we are positioned in the world. It has some meaning to humanity, and on thinking, I am not quite sure what.

Well, I have just done a wee Google and here is what I found. The first record of any celebrations of this auspicious occasion of New Year, was back in 2000 BCE in Mesopotamia (I just found out it is more politically correct to use BCE because it is simply a non-religious form of BC. It stands for 'before the current or common era'. Yes, I am completely ignorant in some areas).

The date or time of year New Year celebrations took place varied widely throughout the world until more recently when January 1 became the relative norm.

Evidently William the Conqueror (c.1028–1087) decreed it should be Jan 1 but Christendom thought otherwise and celebrated instead on the 25th of March. It wasn't until 1582, when the Gregorian calendar was adopted, that it went back to Jan 1, well, the Catholic Church did anyway. Slowly many countries adopted the same date. Russia though, took until 1918 to join the club.

Julius Caesar considered the New Year celebration to be a time of reflection, a time to look back at what had happened and plan for the year ahead. I quite like that idea.

Maybe I should take that on, although again, we really should be doing that throughout the year but sometimes it all becomes so busy that we forget.

How we celebrate New Year around our fair planet is as varied as there are cultures. In Spain and the Philippines they eat a grape at each stroke of midnight, each grape bringing good luck for the following year.

### It's worth a shot

Now that's an easy one to do if you are feeling down in your luck. Maybe you could do a couple for one month to bring you extra good luck and put up with a bad month. You could choose by selecting which stroke you did it on

and which one you missed. Not sure if that would work or not but hey, worth a shot.

In Denmark they break old crockery against the doors of the homes of friends and family to ward off bad spirits – but that would not be pleasant to clean up with a hangover! In Columbia they carry an empty suitcase around the block in the hopes of a travel-filled year.

I think I like the following one the best though, and it takes place in a number of South American countries -- they don a pair of lucky undies, red for love and yellow for money. Red and yellow stripes or polka dots I am sure, will bring both.

If only it was all so simple, but then maybe it is. Have you tried it, and did it work?

I think the Chinese do it well also with their 15 days of celebration. They base the date on their lunisolar calendar, it being the time that the new moon appears between Jan 21 and Feb 20, so varies from year to year.

I must say, from the Larnach Castle point of view, Chinese New Year does bring the Chinese people to



You can start with just one spore of *Polystichum* and end up with 12 different species

our fair country. Ahh it is so good that we are sort of back to normal with tourism. The place is full of people and the buses are rolling in. In some ways it all still seems quite weird; one can forget so quickly the way things used to be. I do not think though, that the tourism levels will ever be what they once were, we are moving into a new norm – gosh sounded like an old cow there.

Really, we just have to accept what comes our way and make the most of whatever happens; just try and be positive about life and look for the good of the year and try not to focus on the bad.

### Back to where we came from

The same goes with our native plants – we need to look at how incredible they are. So to continue where I left off in Comm Hort last issue, where and how did the rest of the inhabitants of NZ get here and why are they like they are, well our plants anyway?

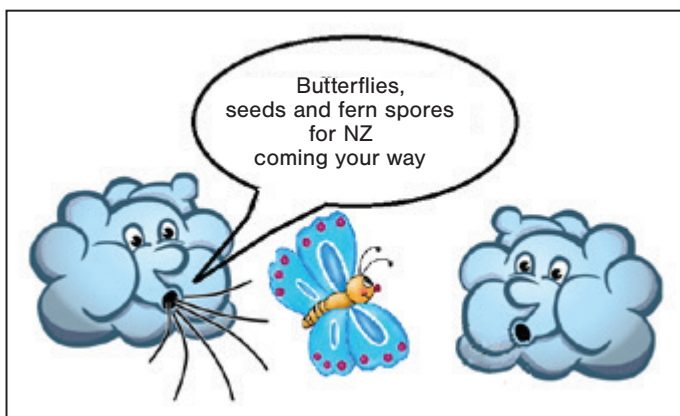
We are all interlopers, we are all migrants and, as we saw last issue, very few survived the journey, as they wandered the oceans, to become the forerunners of Aotearoa NZ.

The kiwi is an odd ball and is believed to have island hopped, it's closest relative being the extinct elephant bird from Madagascar, also a land dweller.

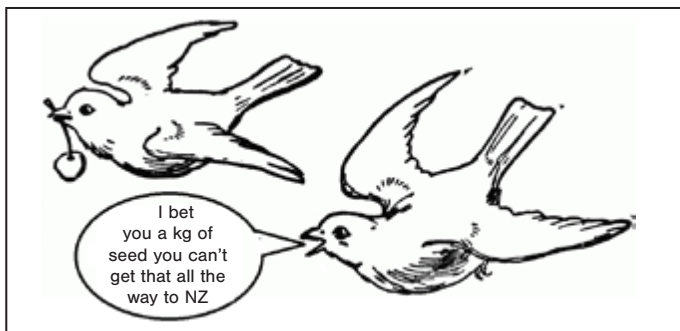
The moa, takahe, tui, bellbird, weka and piwakawaka (the most recent arrival) are all thought to have flown – or been blown – from Australia. Amazingly, pre-human habitation, a quarter of our land and freshwater birds were flightless and many others became poor fliers as there were no mammals so lots of niches to fill. Wings were no longer required.

The wattlebirds, kokako and tieke (saddleback) are thought to have been here for about 27 million years having originated in Melanesia. The tuatara is now not thought to have arrived on a raft of vegetation as it has a close relative in the land of Aus.

Many other bird species have passed through or have resided on our fair country but did not survive the harsh climate and/or find the forage necessary for their survival.



Probably the biggest disperser of seeds etc to our fair country came via the wind. Many, many of both our plants and animals have relatives on the large continent closest to us. But we played our role too, sending species further round the globe, well predominantly to the South Pacific



Birds definitely played a huge role in getting many of our native plant species here, whether it was in their gut or attached to their feathers.

I am not quite sure if many arrived in the manner I have shown but, who are we to judge, we were not there

Right: some of our creatures, especially the tuatara, are believed to have arrived on rafts of vegetation having floated across the oceans. It is very possible that some of our plants also came the same way, most having originated from our cousins from across the ditch



So where did our plants come from and how did they get here? Well, kowhai seeds can survive in the oceans for a long period of time so they are thought to have

floated. There were other species that came attached or within the gut of birds and then, there is of course the wind. The latter includes the orchids, metrosideros,



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## PLANT BASICS



*Myrsine is thought to have arrived here around 37 million years ago evolving into 11 distinct species*

may, at times, disappear. The birds could not be obligate nectar feeders, as the flora did not exist. A mere 8% of our plants are bird pollinated and even then insects also play a huge role with these species. It is these plants that produce the incredibly showy flowers that people love to put in their gardens.

Our birds are primarily omnivores with the only true herbivore being the keruru. The birds needed to be as adaptable as the plants to simply survive. One third are not even pollinated by an animal!

## Where our plants came from

*continued from previous page*

mosses and ferns. Recently an Australian orchid was found here, the seed believed to have simply blown over.

The metros are believed to have been here for 60 million odd years, evolving into 12 distinct species, half of which are climbers. Beech trees, once thought to have survived the journey from Gondwana, are now thought to have arrived around 30 million years ago.

Myrsine is a little younger having been here for around 37 million years, evolving into 12 distinct species. Incredibly the alpine flora is believed to have only started around 22 million years ago but hey, there was probably nowhere for them before that. On reflection the uplift of the Southern Alps was a mere 5 million years ago.

Our hebes, our most prolific genera, arrived a mere 3.7 million years ago from the Northern Hemisphere (hence why they are now veronica). The seed that arrived obviously had the ability to evolve and adapt quickly to our ever-changing landscape and climate.

We are, in so many ways, a young country and our flora is just that really. The plants we have, have had to learn to survive through our periods of glaciation and quickly spread again through interglacial periods.

They had to be dynamic, slotting into ecological niches that

Our insect pollinators were small, most with very small mouth parts, so the plants did not need to produce showy flowers. Why bother putting energy into large showy flowers when there were few animals to enjoy them? As I have discussed in previous articles, our twiggy flora exists through an incredibly wide range of genera. It was these that could survive the glaciations, the cold and the dry. Large flowers for them were a waste of time.

## Catering for the pollinators

Our flora is what it is because of our pollinators - do not blame our plants, they were just trying to reproduce and for this they had to produce flowers suitable to the pollinators. Eighty percent of our vascular plants are found nowhere else in the world; we are a unique country, and we should simply take pleasure in the uniqueness of our plants -- they were adaptable and that is why they survived.

Maybe we should learn from them; be more adaptable and take pleasure in having found this wonderful country to live in.

Hopefully the best months of our beautiful country (February and March), especially those of you who have been blasted by extreme summer weather, will bring something to make us all happy again. I do like it when we are a happy country. Start looking for the good, guys, not the bad.



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Left: one of the new varieties and, right, dragon varieties on trial at Vietnam's Southern Horticultural Research Institute



## Worldwide potential seen for new varieties of dragon fruit

**T**HE FIRST new varieties of dragon fruit from a joint NZ-Vietnam breeding programme are set to be launched to the global marketplace.

Plant & Food Research in NZ and the Southern Horticultural Research Institute (SOFRI) in Vietnam have been working together since 2013 on the program.

The new varieties are red-skinned, with a sweeter, more

aromatic flavour than current varieties, and with a crisp dense texture. They vary in flesh colour, one with the traditional white flesh most commonly seen, a

unique pink-fleshed variety, and a dark, red-fleshed variety.

The varieties are believed to be the first canker-tolerant dragon fruit to be commercialised. Canker is a highly destructive disease of dragon fruit.

Dragon fruit is highly sought after by Asian consumers and Vietnam is the largest supplier in the world. It produces around 1 million tonnes, and increased its production area from 10,000ha in 2010 to more than 50,000ha by 2018.

Initially, the new varieties will be commercially developed in Vietnam for export markets al-

though Plant & Food says it will be continuing to evaluate the varieties at its Kerikeri Research Centre to determine the requirements for and feasibility of growing them in New Zealand.

T&G Global's IP management and commercialisation company, VentureFruit, has been granted exclusive global commercialisation rights to the first three varieties from the breeding programme. Royalties will flow back to Plant & Food Research and SOFRI as the breeders and owners of the varieties.

## Native Plant Nursery Wanted

I am interested in purchasing a nursery of scale that is already focused on native plants, or can be repurposed as such.

Revegetation has been a passion of mine since I foolishly enrolled in a forestry degree back in the 70's.

I feel that now is the time to truly become involved in native plant 'rehabilitation' or whatever the catchall phrase is for encouraging land holders of all stripes to plant native plants.

If you are interested in selling your nursery (or in finding a financial partner) then I would like to talk to you - confidentially of course.

Please call me on 0274 436 480 or preferably email me on:

[michael.bird@xtra.co.nz](mailto:michael.bird@xtra.co.nz)



Original vacuum unit developed for a hellebore grower

## Mega vacuum cleaner for insects

Micothon BV, a Dutch company that develops greenhouse crop protection systems for clients around the world, has come up with a mega vacuum cleaner that sucks up flying insects in greenhouses.

The company had already developed a successful vacuum cleaner for a hellebore grower when in 2021 it was approached by Dutch cress grower, Koppert Cress BV, to see if a solution could be produced for them.

Koppert wanted to introduce a sustainable way to get rid of the flying insects in their crops without using chemicals. Micothon says it modified the hellebore vacuum cleaner design and the new unit has now been successfully built and installed.

It says its insect vacuum units can be set up to suit different crops by altering things like the suction power, speed, and number of treatments. For more info see [www.micothon.com](http://www.micothon.com)

## New coating said to prolong shelf life of fruit and vege

**R**ESearchers AT the Indian Institute of Technology in Guwahati have developed an edible material that, coated on vegetables and fruits, substantially extends their shelf life.

They say the material has been tested on potato, tomato, green chili, strawberry, mandarin, apple, pineapple, and kiwifruit and has been found to keep these vegetables fresh for nearly two months.

The team used a mix of a micro-algae extracts and polysaccharides to produce the films. The micro-algae, called *Dunaliella tertiolecta*, is known for its antioxidant properties, said the team in a statement.

"The newly-developed coatings can be mass-produced and are unique. They are very stable to light, heat and temperature up to 40deg C, can be safely eaten as part of the product formulation and do not add unfavourable properties to it.

"They retain the texture, colour, appearance, flavour, nutritional value and microbial safety of the fruit or vegetable that has been coated, thereby enhancing their shelf life to several weeks to months."

Field trials with farmers are continuing and an IIT Guwahati-based start-up, Biojagat Private Limited, is working on commercialising the formulations.



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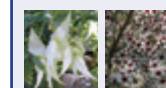
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Email: [tawa\\_glen@xtra.co.nz](mailto:tawa_glen@xtra.co.nz) Web: [www.tawaglen.co.nz](http://www.tawaglen.co.nz)

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Indent orders available

Plugs @ 75c each per 100

Enquiries and Orders to:

Kath Allen: 027 222 2300 Jeffery Martin: 027 222 2778

Email: [kiwiplants@kiwiplants.co.nz](mailto:kiwiplants@kiwiplants.co.nz)

Monthly trade list available + at [www.kiwiplants.co.nz](http://www.kiwiplants.co.nz)

## GOLs

BUTLERS NURSERY: Suppliers of quality liners from the 'Top of the South'. List available, Monthly Specials. Contract propagation undertaken. Ph/fax 03 5702042 email [butlernursery@xtra.co.nz](mailto:butlernursery@xtra.co.nz)

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Ribbonwood Nurseries

Dunedin. Ph 03 4534673

Email: [ribbonwoodnatives@hotmail.com](mailto:ribbonwoodnatives@hotmail.com)

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