



Bason botanic gardens trust

summer 2019/20 newsletter

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From the Chair

WELCOME TO SUMMER 2019/20

There is an extra day in February this year and what better way to spend it than treating yourself to an afternoon and evening at the Bason Botanic Gardens, enjoying the tranquillity gardens, a barbecue, a Shakespearean play, or even all three! Produced by Elise Googe and directed by Karen Craig, "The Merchant of Venice", will be the third Shakespearean play performed in our natural amphitheatre and frisbee arena from February 27 to March 1.

Elise tells us more about the play later in this newsletter.

Fulton Hogan staff have, once again, prepared the gardens well for the summer and my hat goes off to them. Phil Thomsen spoke with Nicole Smith about her role looking after the orchid collection and tells us of her obvious passion.

Clive Higgin continues to spread his love for things arboreal and this time invites us to have a sniff around an Osmanthus and, still on an olfactory theme, Hel Loader wanders among some fragrant shrubs.

This coming year will see us engaging more with our "Friends of the Bason" and finding more ways to involve and reward our supporters through better experiences, education and entertainment at the gardens. Looking forward to seeing you there and enjoying a Whanganui treasure.

Terry Dowdeswell
Chair
Bason Botanic
Gardens Trust



BASON BOTANIC GARDENS PRESENT SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK

The **MERCHANT**
of **VENICE**

SHAKESPEARE'S DARKEST COMEDY
27TH FEB - 1ST MAR
TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM THE
ROYAL WHANGANUI OPERA HOUSE

SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK 2020 REHEARSALS FULL STEAM AHEAD

Rehearsals are well underway for the 2020 Shakespeare-in-the-Park-Whanganui production to be staged at the Bason Botanic Gardens. Next year's production will see a little slice of 16th century Venice brought to Whanganui with the play 'The Merchant of Venice'. Arguably Shakespeare's darkest comedy, *The Merchant of Venice* explores issues of greed, religious persecution, revenge and sexism. These intense and still relevant themes attracted a plethora of experienced thespians and relative newcomers to the auditions. With the roles now cast Director Karen Craig has been busy working with the actors to bring the diverse range of characters that populate the show to life.

The Merchant of Venice is responsible for many famous lines that we still use in common parlance today - 'the devil is in the details', 'a pound of flesh' and 'love is blind'. It also features one of Shakespeare's most famous villains, Shylock. Some alterations have been made to the play for next year's production to better suit a modern audience. These include a slight shortening of the duration and the addition of some unwritten comic characters, to add more opportunities for humour.

The show is a true community production with actors ranging in age from 13 to 82. Some, such as Shylock actor Paul Lyons, have performed in dozens of Shakespeare productions. For others, who have only tread the boards a few times, this will be their first experience performing Shakespeare. The play is rich with a diverse range of characters including dynamic female leads, clueless ne'er do wells, foolhardy lovers and obstinate curmudgeons.

The outdoor staging at the Bason Botanic Gardens has proved to be a hit with audiences in the past and infrastructural improvements, such as the addition of power conduits so that generators can be located further away, will only add to audience enjoyment of the unique setting the gardens offer. Shakespeare in the Park 2020 tickets are on sale now from the Royal Whanganui Opera House. Show dates are Thursday 27 to Saturday 29 February evening and Sunday 1 March matinee. Ticket prices are: full \$25, senior and student \$15, child (under 18) \$10.



BOOKINGS: Direct all Botanic Gardens venue/BBQ bookings to the Customer Service Desk Whanganui District Council, phone 349 0001.

Become a Friend of the Bason, or gift a subscription, and support Stanley Bason's dream.

Send your name, postal and email address to BBGT Treasurer:
email lidyschouw@gmail.com

Membership: Individual \$20; Family \$30; Corporate \$100; Life \$500
Internet banking details are:

Account Name: Bason Botanic Gardens Trust Account

Account Number: 03-0791-0463019-00

Use your name as a reference and also please state whether this is a donation or membership subscription.

Payment may also be mail by snail mail to -
The Treasurer, Bason Botanic Gardens Trust, PO Box 778, Wanganui

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ORCHIDS AT THE BASON

Orchids are the most exotic and bizarre flowers in the plant kingdom. Where one can usually easily recognise a rose, camellia or lily, orchids are endlessly diverse. Some look like kites, insects, monkey faces, or spooky little men. Even someone who has been an enthusiast for decades can never become blasé about them – they will see some at a show or nursery which makes them say “Wow!” every time.

The Bason is fortunate to have a strong legacy in orchids. Winston and Agnes Larsen generously left a significant bequest for the provision of orchids at the Gardens. This paid for the Larsen Orchid House, and also an endowment for the purchase of an orchid collection. Interest from this bequest still accrues and pays for development of the collection.

During the turn of the century Curator Don Stephenson, who had been a commercial orchid grower in Sydney, maintained the collection and was instrumental in gaining awards for some of the plants exhibited. The major collections exhibited are of Phalaenopsis (moth orchids), Cymbidium, Dendrobium, Pleione, Paphiopedilum (slipper orchids), Oncidium, Masdevallia and Sarcocylus.

Currently the collection is cared for by contractors employed by Fulton Hogan for the District Council, in particular Nicole Smith. Nicole is free with advice and comments about the orchids if she is found in the conservatories. She is building up a database with photographs of the various varieties at the Bason, and how they are progressing. Nicole does the writing up in her own time, because of her passion for orchids and the Bason. She says that she feels that it is a privilege to be entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining the orchid collection.

If visitors have a further interest in learning about orchids or growing them, there are orchid societies active around the country. Nicole and two Board members (Phil Thomsen and Alan Donald) are members of the Wanganui Orchid Society. The friendly club is a way for people to get together to enjoy a shared love of orchids, and learn how to grow them in a supportive environment

The Society meets on the first Tuesday of the month, at 7.00pm at the Forrest Lounge at Dempsey and Forrest. Over winter the club meets on the first Sunday of the month at 2.00pm. A friendly competition is held, orchid-related matters are discussed, and there is often a discussion about orchid culture. Sometimes trips are arranged to orchid growers. If you are interested in joining, contact President Kath Bourne, Ph. 021 259 3937, or Secretary Lois Allan, Ph. 06 344 4623 email loisallan@xtra.co.nz.

Phil Thomsen



OSMANTHUS

Osmanthus are a class act. They're not in the eye-candy realm of plants, so this might explain why they're not better known here. In Southeast Asia, they are a temple tree.

I first saw a large 5-metre tree in full flower in Auckland many years ago. Or rather, I smelt something beautiful and tracked it down. It was an osmanthus, I imagine *O. fragrans*. Without the small, white, highly scented flowers, it would not have been particularly noticeable.

Perhaps this is my excuse for having passed by and not having noticed for almost the last 50 years a possible osmanthus at the Bason.

It was only last year that I wondered what the 5-6m tree was, with dark, thick, oblanceolate leaves. Going along the Bason's top ring road clockwise, on the right perhaps 150m past the homestead's old garage,



Osmanthus fragrans

is the suspected osmanthus. So check it out and see what you think.

Some more info. There are about 30 species of osmanthus, from shrub to tree size. In the Oleaceae family, it's therefore related to the olive and our native maire, among others. The osmanthus species all come from the US, Middle East and East Asia. They have common names such as devilwood, sweet olive, Chinese holly and holly olive.

A particular favourite of mine is a cultivar of *O. heterophyllus* called 'Goshiki'. It has a soft, mottled cream variegation in its evergreen leaves.



Suspected Osmanthus fragrans

All osmanthus are evergreen.

Keep a look out for this and others in nurseries, as they are perfect suburban plants.

Clive Higgin

FRAGRANT FLOWERING SHRUBS

Spring has passed and with it the host of daffodils and tulips are dying back. Before the full blast of summer colour comes into force there is a quiet lull in the gardens as they wait for the sun and heat to build up.

For the last month we've been treated to the delicious waft of scent coming from the sensory garden at the top of path that leads down the Millennium Hill. Often the flowers here are harder to see, but if you follow your nose you can track down the source. The unmistakable bubblegum smell of the Port Wine Magnolia, *Michelia figo*, has been particularly noticeable; this bright green shrub makes a great hedge or small tree for the home garden. At the Bason they have recently been cut back to keep them to manageable size.

At the rear of one of the borders in the Homestead Garden, the hedge of Magnolia 'Velvet and Cream' and *Michelia yunnanensis*, have been flowering and smelling amazing.

While you are in the Homestead Garden take a few moments to catch the last of the wisteria on the pergola. This member of the legume family has highly scented flowers (think of the fragrance of Sweet Peas) and it has made a wonderful show this year. While the Michelias are coming to the end of their flowering period, if you wander around the gardens you will find the aptly named Australian Frangipani, *Hymenosporum flavum*; this Queensland native

forms a tall slender tree which flowers through most of summer. Its yellow flowers smell like the tropical frangipani but the tree is hardy enough for us to grow in our gardens. This tree, growing at the Bason by the Iris Garden, is a favourite with Tui and other nectar loving birds. It is a good example of what this fast growing tree becomes. If you like the scent but don't have room for the tree, then look out for the dwarf form *Hymenosporum flavum* 'Gold Nugget', this naturally dense shrub grows to only a metre high.

Hel Loader



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c/- PO Box 778, Wanganui

