



# Bason botanic gardens trust

winter 2020 newsletter

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## WELCOME TO THE BASON - POST LOCKDOWN

In this issue we have news from Wendy Bainbridge about managing the gardens under lockdown plus three entirely different, but plant related, articles from Phil Thomsen, Hel Loader and Clive Higgle.

I'm going to kick off with an introduction to Veronica Smith, one of the Fulton Hogan team at the Bason. You will usually find Veronica in the homestead garden, possibly tending the veronica. Sorry. She also has a very keen interest in the delphiniums which she helped to coax into a magnificent display last summer. And when you find her, like Megan and Nicole, she always will be cheerful, smiling and happy to engage. We are very lucky to have three such positive, dedicated and knowledgeable people looking after these Gardens, so thank you Veronica, you're always a pleasure to meet and add to the joy of the place.



Veronica Smith

## FACEBOOK

Please don't forget to visit and maybe contribute to our Facebook page, with your photos and comments. This is an important part of bringing the gardens to the people of Whanganui and the greater our profile, the more visitors from town and around will come to enjoy them and learn of the beauty and benefits of plants. You might even like to post your photos on other local Facebook pages such as "Whanganui & Area News". It all helps to spread the word.

The autumn display at the gardens is the best I've ever seen it. If you have not done so already, I suggest you make a trip out there asap, before it's passed. Treat yourself. Be quick!

Terry Dowdeswell  
Chair  
Bason Botanic  
Gardens Trust



## AUTUMNAL TREASURES

As the days shorten and trees start their colourful autumnal display it really only means one thing for me, that I will be gathering nuts in May, specifically walnuts. The past weeks haven't been so much as a lock down for me as a nut down, so I was more than happy to get out and about and one of the first places I visited was our Botanical Gardens. The walnuts have fallen at the Bason



and the trees are now in their wonderful golden livery, beautiful in the sunshine and just as atmospheric in the foggy rain when the Beech, Liquidambar and all the rest glow in the diffuse light.

It was just as lovely to nod to the others enjoying the vast open spaces the gardens offer. And it wasn't just the kids kicking up piles of leaves and revelling in the change of season. Some people think that gardens can be a bit boring as we head into winter now that the showy summer blooms have packed it in for the year. But I like this time of year as it reminds us that structure and leaves play a significant role in the success of a garden.



*Early Camellia on the Spring Walk*

We may not all have room for an Arboretum, but we can all enjoy visiting the one at the Bason. On a smaller scale the striking Blood Lily flowers on the *Haemanthus coccineus* may have passed but now is the time of year that it sprouts a pair of large green leaves that lead to its other common name – Elephant Ears. While Stanley Bason was justly proud of this South African bulb, his wife Blanche had a fondness for Camilla from the Orient and some of her original shrubs are now coming into bloom in the Homestead Garden. It's not just the flowers that are a stand out on Camellias, many have been lifted to allow for planting below and showcase their gracious smooth barked trunks.

On an even smaller scale look out for the hardy *Cyclamen ciliatum* that is being encouraged to grow as a ground cover near the herbs in the Homestead Garden. This tiny

pink flowering *Cyclamen* has heart shaped leaves which are traced in silvery white. It is a long way from its native homeland in the Turkish Taurus Mountains so be careful not to stray off the lawn and crush it. It won't be long before the Winter Rose or *Helleborus orientalis* starts to flower, but right now we can enjoy their fabulous evergreen leaves which look great mass planted and help provide depth and texture to the garden. As they come from both Europe and Asia they are classified as Eurasian plants, many have been hybridized and flower in a range of colours including, black, white and pink. My personal favourite is the unfortunately named Stinking Hellebore, *Helleborus foetidus*, as its leaves are more finely fingered and I like its bright lime

green flowers. Not to be out done in the foliage front, our own native *Astelia*s stand out among the green leaves with their striking sword like foliage, especially large silver leaves of *Astelia chathamica*, or the finer silver foliage of *Astelia banksii*.

If you are a plant nut like me then while we may not be able to physically travel to exotic locations to find rare and unusual plants, we have the advantage of nipping out to our very own Botanical Gardens where you can find an array of some of the worlds best plants. I can't wait for winter when I get to see the flowering Aloes from Africa.

*See pages 4 & 5 for more images.*

Hel Loader

## MORETON BAY FIG STUMP

There has been interest in the stump, which is pictured, on the main drive to the right just before you reach the main carpark on the Top Flat. This was a Moreton Bay fig, which blew to pieces in a storm to become a danger, and therefore had to be removed by the District Council. However, these trees develop an extensive root system on top of the ground. Since it was impractical to remove this, it has been left until it decays enough to be removed easily. The root system is needed to help support the tree, which can grow enormous.

A number of Moreton Bay figs are still growing in the Gardens, and add to the tropical theme around the Conservatories. There is a large tree in Pakaitore / Moutoa Gardens, and even bigger ones in Russell (Bay of Islands) and Albert Park, Auckland, among others. One in Devonport has many aerial roots from the branches rooted into the ground. One of the biggest Moreton Bay figs in the world, at Pahi on the Kaipara Harbour, has a spread of over 50 metres.

Until a couple of decades ago, Moreton Bay figs only produced sterile flowers in New Zealand. However

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eventually a specialist tiny wasp arrived in the country, enabling the development of fruit and seeds. These fruits, which are quite hard and not palatable to people, are nevertheless favoured by kereru, and Moreton Bay fig seedlings now appear in profusion around the Gardens. The most popular host there is the Canary Island phoenix palm (there are a number in the same vicinity as the stump).

This is potentially a problem. The Moreton Bay fig is a "strangler fig". It can germinate high in the branches of a tree, the roots then creeping down to the ground, where they eventually suppress and kill the host tree. This is the form of propagation of the northern rata (such as Ratanui at Bushy Park), and the fear is that it will allow the Moreton Bay fig to get spread into native forest, where it would be difficult to locate and destroy.



*Moreton Bay Fig stump*

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## FROM WDC

Well as we now know, the lockdown came upon us very quickly; and lockdown for our parks and reserve areas meant that contractors were not able to work.

Fortunately growth had slowed down, and despite the very settled warm weather, the grass did not get long enough to harvest for hay, and triffids did not suddenly appear in the gardens. If we were going to have to shut down business, then this was probably a good time of year to have to do so. Had we shut down in Spring, things would have looked quite different.

Of concern at the Bason were the conservatory plants. Luckily, we were able to have Nicole (Fulton Hogan Ltd) come in twice a week to check on things and water as needed. This has meant that we have been able to get the conservatories up and running fairly quickly. Similarly, the contractor for the Winter Gardens also made periodic

visits to make sure that we were able to keep most plants alive. Working alone, they were able to maintain social distancing requirements.

The week before shut-down the annuals had arrived and were virtually all planted the day before contractors stopped work. There was just enough rain to keep things alive which was fortunate. Wallflowers have been used in some gardens at Bason this year, and they are starting to put on a good show already. This week daffodil bulbs were planted into the pergola bed. Yes, a change from the tulips, just for a year.

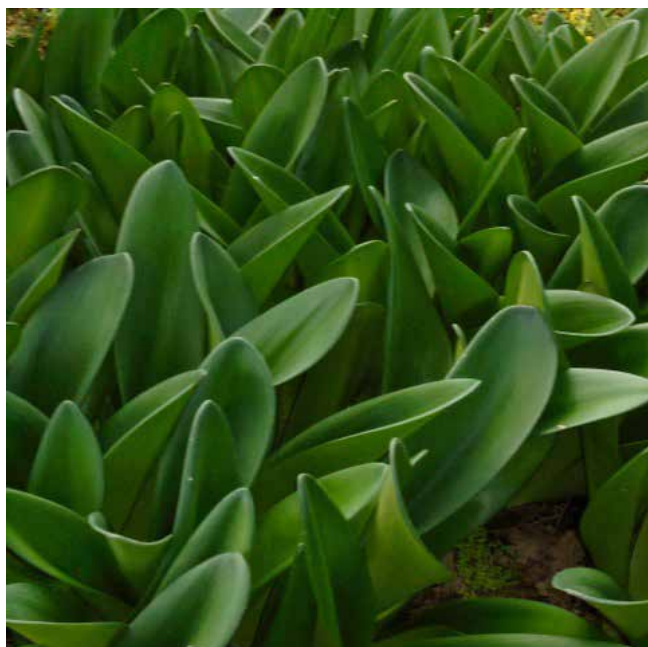
Megan and her team have been concentrating on catching up with weeding and having only been back at work for around 3 weeks, the Bason is again looking good.

Well worth a visit.

Wendy Bainbridge







The distinctive leaf pairs of *Haemanthus coccineus* inspire its common name of Elephant Ears.



Tooth edged leaves of *Hellebore orientalis* in the homestead garden



Yellow flowers and spots on the aptly named Leopard Plant, *Farfugium japonicum* (formerly know as *Ligularia tussilaginea*).



Another member of the farfugium family confusingly called *Ligularia*, this one is the weird and wacky Martian Invader.



The large leaves of *Ligularia reniformis* are the basis of its common name, Tractor seat.



Dramatic whorls of the giant lobelia, *Lobelia abedarica*, are native to the uplands of Kenya and Uganda.





The attractive white edges on our native Marlborough Rock Daisy, *Pachystegia insignis*, draw attention even when the flowers have gone.



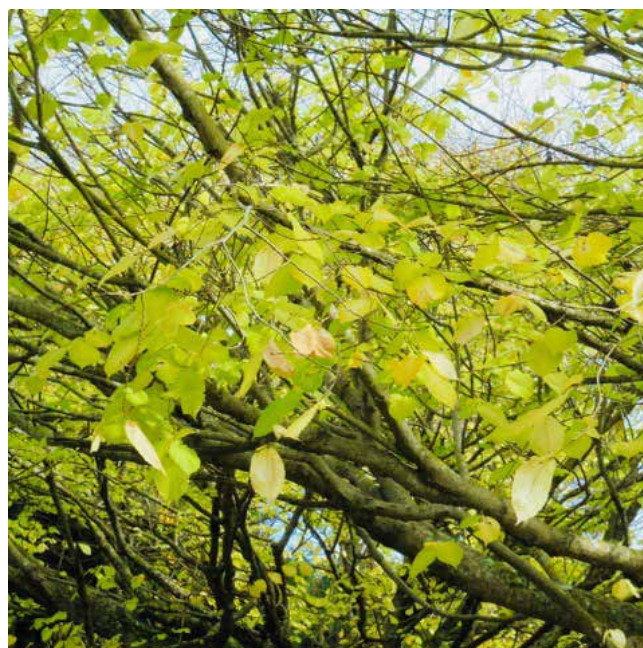
The shaggy clumps of variegated dwarf agapanthus, *Agapanthus Tinkerbell*, has sterile flowers so doesn't become a weed like its thuggish parents.



Beautiful butter yellow leaves of the Maidenhair tree, *Ginkgo biloba*.



Fallen leaves of Liquidambar, a North American tree commonly called Sweetgum gum or Star leaved gum



*Tilia europea*, aka Linden tree is more commonly known as Lime Tree, not for its fruit but for its limey yellow autumn leaves and similarly coloured flowers which can be used to make a lime cordial.



## STRELITZIA CAUDATA

One of the most special and beautiful plants at the Bason Botanic Gardens is *Strelitzia caudata*. This tree-sized "bird of paradise" is to be found in the Homestead Garden, alongside the succulent area.

Of all the strelitzias (four or five species and a few forms/cultivars), *S. caudata* is the most striking. It is bigger and more robust but also not as crowded as *S. nicolai* or *S. alba*. The flowers on all three of these, the tree strelitzias, to me seem very similar. But the arrangement of the leaves, whilst coming from the same drawing board, is distinctive.

*Strelitzia alba* and *S. caudata* are both very uncommon in New Zealand. *S. nicolai* is now everywhere, which is wonderful. Most folk think the tree strelitzias are bananas but they're not even in the same family. Bananas belong to the Musaceae family. Strelitzias belong to the Strelitziaceae. Another member of this family is the traveller's palm, *Ravenala madagascariensis*, with large fan-like leaves, often seen in the tropics.

Our Bason's *Strelitzia caudata* has an interesting history. It was grown from seed which was obtained from Chiltern Seeds, England, as a swap for some of Vonnie Cave's *lapageria* seed. (If you have a spare day and are as strong as a horse, you can propagate from division ...)

It was planted about 30 years ago and grew well. Unfortunately, a few years ago, a luddite, for some unfathomable reason, cut it down. But, halleluia, it

regrew! So, in a few years, we'll be able to re-admire this wonderful strelitzia.  
Clive Higgie



*Strelitzia caudata*



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