



**From The Chair  
Merry Christmas Everyone**

Aren't you pleased to have such a wonderful place as the Bason Botanic Gardens to take the family to over the Christmas and New Year period?

Wide-open spaces, fresh air, beautiful grounds, gardens, plants and buildings, free entry, free barbecues. There are great places to walk, play, rest or simply enjoy. All in an atmosphere that takes you away from the stresses of Covid, and reminds you that the world really is a beautiful place.

Go there this summer. Take your friends. Then go again. It will invigorate your soul and make you thankful for who you are.

In the meantime, please have a read of this bulletin. I contains interesting and informative articles from Clive Higgie, Hel Loader and Phil Thomsen, as well as keeping you up to date about what's happening at the Bason Have a very happy and enjoyable Christmas.

Terry Dowdeswell  
Chair  
Bason Botanic Gardens Trust

**Walkway Update**

Ryan Carter, contracts manager from "Loaders Whanganui", who have been waiting for materials to make a start on the round the lake walkway, told me this week that. Eastown Timber expect the delivery of the H5 timber in February 2022, and that the job will start just as soon as this arrives.

With the Covid-19 traffic light system operating and vaccinations approaching 90% it is now highly likely that this will go ahead in March. Fingers crossed again!

**Website Update**

For many years the Bason website has been hosted and updated through a local provider and designer. While it has performed well, and the service we received was good, organizing seamless content updates, and site upgrades took considerable effort and came at a price.

Several months ago, the Trust Board took the decision to manage our own hosting, website design and management. Lidy Schouw took on this responsibility and has been working long and hard to redesign, and migrate the site to its new



home. We're now hopeful the new site will go live before Christmas. The web address is the same <https://basonbotanicgardens.com/> so your bookmarks will still work, and you will be directed there from your favorite web browser.

You will notice many differences, and many more photographs, which will change from time to time. Having in house control of design and content management has given us far more flexibility, and the ability to easily add far more information, an interactive map etc.

Further building of the site, and the addition of more features, will be ongoing, with the addition of plant references, video's and educational material, as well as previews of events and other developments.

I encourage you to visit our website now, and then frequently pre Christmas. Then, in the new year, you are very welcome to contact us here [basonbotanicgardens@gmail.com](mailto:basonbotanicgardens@gmail.com) with comments about the site and suggestions for improvement.

### A Plague on Shakespeare!

In early November, the cast of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" were well into rehearsals when the decision was taken to postpone this event until February 2023. The cast took this news with considerable grace, but of course, regret.



However, there is a strong will to use the work already done, and the increased time now available, as an opportunity to make the 2023 production an even better event, make it the play of the year even, and a great occasion for families to enjoy an uproarious, bawdy and classic Shakespearian comedy.

Director, Karen Craig and the 23 cast, all of whom are keen and available in 2023, are looking

forward to adding more local nuance, humour and I'm sure, plenty of spice to send up the philandering, inept and, let's face it, "entitled" Sir John Falstaff.

The cast, says Karen, now have the time to cogitate and further develop their characters. It is an

opportunity for them (characters and actors) to merge into each other. Not that Karen wants the whole cast to be the full and feisty figures that Shakespeare portrayed. After all, she still needs to be able to control them to some degree.

This play involves a lot of physical comedy, which calls for well-rehearsed choreography to ensure it all happens, and in a way that is not only exciting, but also safe. There is plenty of opportunity for mingling with the audience too – something you

## Become a Friend of the Bason

### To Receive:

Periodic newsletters highlighting plants and upcoming events  
Special offers on plants and/or seeds of special Bason plants.

**Register here:** <http://basonbotanicgardens.com/support-us/>

### To Volunteer

On the last Tuesday of each month our Bason volunteers meet in the vicinity of the Homestead Garden, where they may be involved in potting up, weeding and general maintenance.

**Contact: Janice 06 3442495 or John 06 3456417**

### Sponsors and benefactors

These wonderful people enable dreams to become realities. If you would like to make a project donation, an endowment or gift of a memorial feature please contact the BBG Trust

**Email here:** [basonbotanicgardens@gmail.com](mailto:basonbotanicgardens@gmail.com)

**BOOKINGS:** Direct all Botanic Gardens venue/BBQ bookings to the Customer Service Desk

Whanganui District Council, phone 349 0001.

### CONTACTS:

#### Chairman

Terry Dowdeswell, c/- PO Box 778, Wanganui  
Ph: 027 351 6104

#### Secretary:

Phil Thomsen, c/- PO Box 778, Wanganui  
Ph: 027 348 6805, PRD@xtra.co.nz

#### Treasurer:

Lidy Schouw. Phone 06 3484020  
email lidyschouw@gmail.com

#### Membership:

Alan Donald, c/- PO Box 778, Wanganui  
Ph: 027 238 8118, alan.f.donald@gmail.com

may imagine is unrehearsed, but does in fact, require a good deal of practice.

This production was always planned to be a celebration of coming out from the shadow of Covid and enjoying entertainment with other like-minded people in a truly beautiful place. Shakespeare's entire career was dogged by the constant threat of plague and the requirements to close the playhouses to halt the spread of disease. Good precedent you might say. What goes around,

comes around! While postponement has been a big regret, the production team are determined to make this a pleasure worth waiting for, and the Bason Botanic Gardens Trust are certainly looking forward to welcoming everyone there and take this opportunity to thank the cast and crew for their understanding and commitment.

In the meantime, over the next few months, why not visit the Bason for a few barbecues and relaxed family afternoons. That's what it's for.

---

### Logo Update

During winter, the board commissioned local graphic designer Tim Garman, to design a new logo for the gardens. While the old one has served us well, it was not a good fit with modern communications media design.

Several proposals were made, shortlisted, and



then reduced to one, which we felt was modern, and appealing to the younger generation of garden lovers. This

will be used on all our communication material.

Thank you for your help with this, Tim. It was an interesting exercise!

---

### New Reading Material

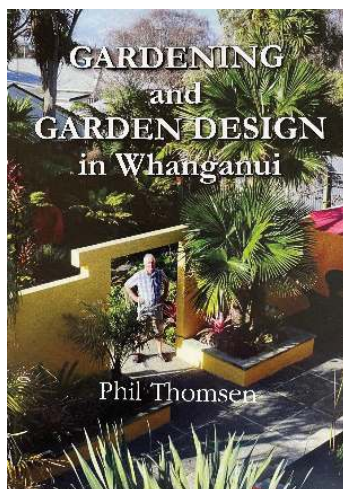
#### "Gardening and Garden Design in Whanganui"

Author – Phil Thomsen

Our long time board member, maniacal gardener and garden artist, launched his much anticipated book on 22nd November.

I was unable to attend the launch and, to my great shame, have only recently bought a copy. The book has 87 pages in glorious full colour, and deals with all aspects of gardening and design, in the Whanganui context, says Phil.

I agree. It is a well-conceived, written, and produced gardening adjunct because, not only



is it extremely useful and interesting but, it works! It blends knowledge with good sense; gives good advice without lecturing and is extremely easy to read.

Furthermore, Phil's virtually family to the Bason, and uses our gardens to reference his design ideas and comments.

And there's a good cause too. All proceeds are being kindly donated to Whanganui Hospice.

"Gardening and Garden Design in Whanganui" is available from Paiges Book shop in Guyton Street, selling out quickly and definitely worth buying.

---

### Council Parks

Well Christmas has a strong eating theme, so why not take a trip out to Bason Botanic Gardens to feast on nature. The house garden has a number impressive colour spots at the moment not the least of which is the Clematis draping itself over the fence, the white Hydrangeas behind the

house, or the row of blue Delphiniums that catch your eye as you enter into the garden.

Hopefully the displays will hang on for the holiday period, but just in case they don't, it is worth popping out there to have a look.

---

The contractors are having to work hard to keep ahead of this humid weather where the weeds quite literally grow in front of your eyes. I would like to thank the contractors for the work that they do for us to enjoy. In particular I would like

to acknowledge Megan who leads the team on site and who I know is putting in long hours at the moment so things will be looking good for the holiday period.

---

## Donation of Orchids

Phil Thomsen

Lindsay Owen is a retired secondary school history teacher. Originally from South Africa and Zambia, Lindsay has had a lifelong passion for orchids, growing cymbidiums and leopard orchids while living in Africa. Cycads were another plant group of interest.

Lindsay also taught in Saudi Arabia, and then in Waitara after they moved to New Zealand. Lindsay and Eileen moved to Whanganui where Lindsay taught at Wanganui Collegiate School and Eileen was an anaesthetist at the hospital.

In Whanganui, Lindsay picked up the interest again, and is currently growing a range of orchid species. The couple have been members of the Wanganui Orchid Society since 2005, and are involved in the various events, such as meetings and shows (Covid permitting). They



*Nicole Smith receives one of the orchids that Lindsay Owen is gifting to the Gardens.*

enjoy the fellowship and shared interest of the members.

Lindsay is keen on promoting and contributing to Bason Botanic Gardens. He said "It is such a lovely facility, and it's great to see it used so well by the public. It's nice to know that we have such an asset on our doorstep, and I'm keen to support it where possible".

As a result, Lindsay donated a number of his orchids to the Gardens, to be displayed in the Larsen Orchid House when in bloom. The plants include cymbidiums, cattleyas and coelogynes. Nicole Smith, who is employed by contractors Fulton Hogan to look after the conservatories, was thrilled to receive the plants, and commented how well they complement and add to the existing collection.

---

## To Mow or Not to Mow

Recently we've been discussing the merits or otherwise of letting the grass grow. It can be a hot horticultural topic and while at this time of year most of us are lifting the blades and not mowing as often in an effort to keep a strong green lawn through summer, a few of us pack away the mower for good.

In a former life I managed an award winning garden maintenance firm and one of the items we were judged on was faultless green lawns, a time consuming and fussy business. But as many of us can attest, a quick cut with the mower can make the rest of the garden look great even if we haven't got around to all the weeding, I guess it's the contrast of the manicured green against the abundance of the garden beds. Maintaining a perfect lawn is a lot of work, mowing is just the start; a dedicated regime of feeding, weeding,

watering and pest control is also required. I must admit that while grass grubs have never had my sympathy I banned the use of worm killers, let's not make a mountain over a few worm hills, it's nothing a good reel mower can't flatten out.

At the Bason, the maintenance team use a mix of lawn lengths in different areas, short cropped in the Homestead Garden, suitable for picnics on the wider greens and flats and longer in less trafficked areas. Part of this is the balance of use and cost, but there are a host of ecological benefits for letting the grass grow. Increased insect population, moisture and soil benefits are part of the story, as are the aesthetics of longer grass resembling meadows.

If you want to let daffodils naturalise in your lawn, like we do at the Bason, you will need to let the grass around them grow until the leaves of the

---

bulbs die back, typically this means longer grass in early spring which can provide a boost to local birds and bees. And it's not just the Bason that does this, the Wellington Botanic Gardens have been doing the same thing as advocated by their Team Leader of Grounds & Trees, Cory Meister: *"Because we no longer mow the whole area, we are using less fuel which means lower carbon emissions, and because it is no longer kept as a fine lawn, we also don't need to use chemicals to control weeds. Instead we allow non-invasive plants and flowers to seed and hand weed out any nasties. All of this results in a smaller environmental impact."*

Traditionally meadows were for cropping hay, over summer, grass was left to grow so it could be cut and harvested for use as winter stock food. But before you picture pretty flowering pastures, think about our climate and land use. New Zealand is not a land of prairie and meadows, our native vegetation is forest and what grassland we had were more tussock than meadow. Our agricultural record has meant we have imported a host of non-native grasses and fodder crops and as most farmers will attest, grass is the basis of their livelihood. Let's not forget that the Bason was once a farm and is surrounded by farmland, so our lawns are really tamed fields. So what's the harm in not mowing?

If you live in the country, few of us mow our verges, the strip along the road is just too long. But most of us don't let the grass grow unchecked, as it will rapidly be taken over by undesirable such as thistles, dock and foxgloves. But while we may not indulge in picturesque poppy filled paddocks, farmers add clover, plantain and chicory to our grasses to improve them. Left to flower, these, along with dandelions and lawn daisies, can produce an attractive meadow like effect. But you will still need to graze, or if four legged mowers aren't your thing then mow them on at least a monthly cycle or the grass will take over and you won't see any flowers for the leaves.

If you live in town, then it can be hard to give over a large part of your garden to create a meadow. You may also find it difficult if you, your neighbours, or pets suffer from allergies that can be brought on by flowering grasses. But if you have fruit trees then plantain, comfrey and chicory will



help as the deep rooted plants will help bring up nutrients to the trees, cut down and mulched in place this is known as a herbal lay. While not a pretty flower, plantain has the added benefit of producing a greater degree of the green leaf volatiles that many of us associate with the smell of fresh cut grass, and these have an uplifting affect that city bound inhabitants miss. Plus farmers love it as it helps fatten lambs faster than standard pasture grass.

Not all of us want a hay meadow. Some pine for wildflower meadow, this is much more difficult than as the needs of wildflowers are for low fertility soils and significant climate changes, which is in conflict for most farm and domestic lawns that thrive on high fertility and high rainfall. Most naturally occurring wildflower areas have significant periods of either drought or snow cover that stops them being forested. Some rely on wild fires to keep the area clear. All tend to have a peak flowering season where the flowers erupt when the weather conditions are right to produce spectacular display before setting seed and going dormant again. At the Bason we are planning a major reworking of our own Prairie Garden as keeping this bed true to its name is particularly difficult in the Whanganui climate. We don't try to maintain a wildflower lawn, rather we work on a bed of prairie style plants and grasses to achieve the desired affect.

Some councils have tried mowing less and having wildflowers on motorway edges, and while people loved the extra flowers it didn't prove to be cost effective as the edges still had to be mowed (or people thought it was neglected) and it required greater effort to keep the grass down to allow for the wildflowers to flourish.

So, to mow or not to mow, that is the question. I am a firm believer in mowing less, and while I wouldn't give up my mower (or the clippings for the compost) there is beauty and more than a few carbon credits in being little shaggy and letting the grass grow.

Hel Loader

## Norfolk Pine at the Bason

One of the most iconic plants at our botanic gardens is the Norfolk pine, *Araucaria heterophylla*. Along with *Phoenix canariensis* and the pohutukawa, it would be the most widely planted tree at BBG. In the first few decades of planting here, it was, indeed, a very different place. Subject to coastal winds/gales, a lot succumbed but not the Norfolk pine, the Canary Island date palm or the pohutukawa. If we look at their provenance, we see similar coastal environments. Norfolk Island and the Canaries are small islands in large water masses and the pohutukawa largely grows on our coast, north of New Plymouth.

But it's the Norfolk pine I want to think of at the moment. *A. heterophylla* comes from (as already said) Norfolk Island. The *Araucaria* genus, *Agathis* (kauri) and podocarps are the big players in the southern hemisphere conifers. Of the 19 *araucaria* species, they are split into two groups: *Eutassa* and *Araucaria*. Since the four sharp ones (monkey puzzle, bunya, parana pine and klinki pine) were first to be named, they took *Araucaria* as their sub-group name, while the rest, the soft ones (13 from New Caledonia, one from Norfolk Island and one from mainland Australia), are in the *Eutassa* sub-group – all still in the *Araucaria* genus.

So, a very small island (Norfolk) and one a bit bigger to the north (New Caledonia) are the evolutionary base for the beautiful *eutassa* *araucarias*. Once, they were, no doubt, part of a common landmass (which included New Zealand too). The Norfolk pine is not a pine (not a *Pinus* species) but was so named because it reminded northern hemisphere settlers of former flora. This prevalence of giving common names that hark back

to a previously familiar flora is unfortunate, but I guess we'll get over it.

Although there's no need to describe the Norfolk pine (perhaps the most easily recognised and widely known tree in New Zealand), most don't know of its usefulness, besides ornamental and shelter. It is a very good timber, perhaps a bit soft and in need of borer treatment, but it's very beautiful and strong, first cousin to our kauri. On Norfolk Island, they would leave logs for a period in salt water to reduce the borer problem.

I remember Keith Burt (former member and long-serving chair of the BBG Friends/Trust Board) had dreamt of roadside plantings leading from the Bason BG to Whanganui – the Norfolk would have been a wonderful candidate. Unfortunately, there was too much red tape and it couldn't happen. A stylised Norfolk pine was part of our previous logo.

- Clive Higgie



*Early plantings of trees at the Bason Circa 1970 showing the effects of the strong winds in open country*



c/- PO Box 778, Wanganui

