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The tour will be escorted by Mrs Pat Stephens of Te Awamutu, an experienced traveller and gardening authority. Interested members are invited to return the coupon, whereupon the printed brochure will be forwarded without obligation.

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"GARDENS TOUR"

Please send the brochure to:
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The Christmas Tree

By DR ERIC GODLEY
(Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch)

IT IS difficult to imagine a connection between the pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*) and the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand; yet the late Johannes C. Andersen, historian of the common names of our native plants, noted that the earliest record that he could find of the name Christmas tree for the pohutukawa was in a publication issued by the Company in 1884. This was entitled "Maoriand: an illustrated handbook to New Zealand".

To northerners, anyway, the pohutukawa is our most famous summer-flowering native plant, happily associated with holidays at the beach at Christmas time. The flowering period of the species extends from late November to early February. The brilliant colour of the flowers is due to the long scarlet filaments of the stamens, and the flowers are excellent examples of what German flower biologists call pinsel-blumen, or brush flowers.

The best way to get accurate information about flowering in the pohutukawa would be to study market trees year by year. I have not been able to do this, but the following facts should be of interest. On 19 May, 1977, I examined a pohutukawa in the Bay of Islands and could see no sign of developing inflorescences. Only the white buds which produce either inflorescences or new leafy shoots could be clearly seen in the axils of the leaves at the tips of branches.

Just when the buds began to open I do not know, but I saw this tree again on 1 December and it had just begun to flower. A friend timed the flowering period and found that it lasted until 10 January, i.e. 41 days. I am told that this tree is consistently early in its flowering, and, in fact, in 1972 had noted that it had just begun to flower on 30 November. My friend also observed that a nearby tree began flowering on 14 January and that another a little further away had just begun on 17 January. So here within the same population of pohutukawas we have significant differences

*9. Rose
flowers*



children's
page

CLUB NOTES

Hi, Junior Gardeners,

This month we welcome a new member, TENE, which is short for Kirstene who lives at Te Awamutu. Tene is one of those lucky people who live on a farm, where there is lots of room for gardens as well as the trampoline and swimming pool. Tene's own garden is just out by her bedroom window. She has a fine collection of flowers, as well as some strawberries. I hope you beat the birds to those berries, Tene.

Now I promised we'd have the **rest of KATIE FETTES'**

letter. I do wish we had room for the whole of it. Katie writes such interesting letters. She had been telling us about that wierd Venus's fly trap that liked live insects but spat out dead ones.

Then she told about a visit to a very interesting farm near Nelson, where there are, among other things, Chinese Gooseberries which Katie says look really cute and fuzzy when they're young. Katie is trying some out at her new home near Auckland. (I seem to have mistaid your new address, could we have it please?)

And here's something to think about. Katie made an experiment. She says "we used to take plants to my old school to decorate the window sill, and only one of mine out of six survived—but the one that did survive was the one I sat right next to, and it flourished like a house on fire. Do you think plant feelings had anything to do with that?"

Well, what do the rest of you think? Might plants have feelings? We'd be interested to know what you think. Good gardening all,
MRS MAC.

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The N.Z. GARDENER announce their Sun-Flower growing Competition for Children 14 years and under. The following are the rules and conditions for this:

1. Entrants must be 14 years and under.
2. Entry forms must be filled in and signed by both the child entering and a Parent or Guardian.
3. The Entry form at the bottom of this page must be sent:

Children's Competition,
P.O. Box 6117,
WELLINGTON.
With a return address stamped envelope.

All Photos must be in by 31st March, 1978.
The winner will be announced in the May Gardener. The Judges decision will be final.
**ENTRY FORM FOR N.Z. GARDENER
SUN-FLOWER COMPETITION**

NAME:

ADDRESS:

SCHOOL:

AGE:

AN EYE CATCHER FOR THE GARDEN

By MATTHEW BIRD

A GARDEN ornament, to have impact, does not have to be elaborate or costly. Here is one that is neither and it does wonders for the garden it is in. The structure has its own merit as a type of sculpture, and also doubles as a pot plant holder.

It is a simple structure that can be put together with a minimum of effort, time and materials. All that is needed is three poles, each a little over two metres long, some lengths of cord and three sturdy boxes or other containers.

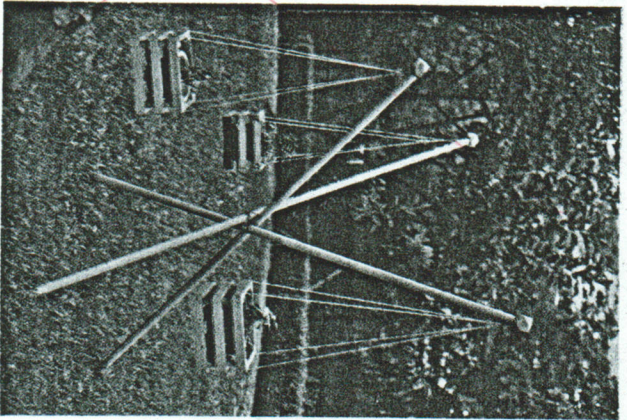
The poles do not have to conform to the exact same length. In fact, special effects can be created by using poles of different length.

To give the end the flag-pole appearance, that is fitting it out with a knob, a small block of wood (about 35 cm square) must be "doctored" to an octagonal shape. Simply cut off the four corners of the block and attach it to the pole by driving a nail through it and into the pole if it is wooden.

If the pole is made of metal tubing, a short piece of round-section timber must be found that will fit inside the tubing. A section of an old broom handle could be suitable. This should be attached to the block by driving a long nail through one and into the other. Then it is inserted into the tube.

The poles are now ready to be put together in the suggested manner. Mark three points on the ground in a roughly triangular configuration and no more than one metre apart. With the pointed end of a crowbar, make a hole at each mark about 15 cm deep and sloping inwards.

The poles are inserted into these holes. Criss-cross the poles at about their mid-points and wrap a length of wire



Simple to put together, this structure is both sculpture and pot plant show-case.

around the criss-cross point to secure the position.

Many different arrangements can be tried. In the pictured example, one of the poles is made to be more upright than the others. This creates a special effect. But there are many other ways, that can be experimented with, to create special effects.

Any type of pot holder can be hung from the ends of the poles. In this case, boxes have been chosen and the open appearance of the slated type of box is to be preferred. Solid-sided boxes lack the same attractiveness.

Christmas Tree (from page 58)

in flowering time. If, as I suspect, these differences are genetically controlled, then there is an opportunity to select early and late-flowering lines of the pohutukawa so that a two-tree garden could have flowering over perhaps 60-70 days.

Another Auckland correspondent noted that a tree at Cheltenham Beach flowered from 6 December to 7 January, 1977-78, i.e. 53 days; and that a typical inflorescence, with 4 sets of 3 flowers, was in flower for 12 days, with the single flowers lasting from 6 to 8 days.

One often hears that "the pohutukawas were early (or late) this year". However, to be of any use or even credibility, such statements should not be based on vague general observations but related to specific trees with a known flowering history. We are dealing with a genetical component which determines whether some trees always flower earlier than others, and complex factors of the environment, varying from year to year, which vary the flowering time of a tree about a mean.

Another aspect of flowering controlled by complex factors is the amount of flowering of a single tree. This depends on the relative proportions of buds which produce flowers and those which produce new leaves. By November it is quite easy to see that some trees have a high proportion of young whitish leaves and will flower poorly, while in others the white developing inflorescences predominate.

Isolated trees of the pohutukawa produce fruit, and trees appear to be self-fertile. Cross pollination between trees will occur, however, through the visits of honey bees seeking the copious nectar produced on the yellow disc of the flower, and by the visits of nectar-seeking birds. The latter include not only native birds, but also the introduced house-sparrow, of which I have records from the Bay of Islands and Auckland.

Rose Notes (from page 19)

Towards the end of this month is the time to prune *Whichuaniana* roses. These are usually grown as Weeping Standards. The best method for pruning these once blooming standards, is

to cut out all the short stems which have produced flowers this season, also any weak or aged wood. If the plant is growing isolated and not growing prolifically, remember these weeping roses require feeding and watering. During the flowering period they should also be producing new growths from the scion. If there are sufficient of these, some of the older wood can be removed. These young shoots should be tied to the stem to prevent their being blow off during high wind. Remember that after their flowering, these bushes require spraying and a mulch around their roots to feed the young growths which will produce next year's blooms.

This is the month when holidays begin, so do not forget the roses or the rose beds. Before going away, apply a good mulch after watering the beds and surrounding areas. If the soil is showing dry a stirring of the surface is advisable before applying a light dressing of a mixed balanced fertiliser.

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