

# Significantly beautiful and eye catching

When the New Zealand Gardens Trust listed Puketarata as a garden of national significance, Jennifer Horner, former science teacher, amateur geologist and hobby gardener felt relieved. Not because she sought praise, but because she finally had expert confirmation she was on the right path. Jill Wild explains.

**T**HE HORNER family garden on a hillside next to the ancient Puketarata Pa in Taranaki is the vision of two amateur gardeners who have worked their magic over decades. There has never been a planting plan for Jennifer and Ken Horner, it's evolved from pastoral land that had a few trees, fences and stock.

"I've always loved gardening," explains Jennifer. "There are generations of gardeners on my father's side of the family so you could say gardening is in the genes. When we built the house here in 1983 we had ideas about what we wanted in the surrounds, a big lawn and an orchard and beyond that it's progressed naturally."

Today the garden is open by appointment throughout the year and for 10 consecutive days in November as a part of the Powerco Taranaki Garden Spectacular. The Horners are happy to share the garden, keen to encourage others and always happy to enjoy garden chatter. When Puketarata was judged a garden of national significance eight years ago, the Horners felt honoured.

"I have an emphasis on natives but I like the garden to have all-year-round interest and colour. When we first arrived we fenced off the gully because it was very steep and just poked plants in every now and then. That area now has a QE II covenant, it's walking tracks feature many mature natives, cherry trees, rhododendrons, magnolias and various other deciduous trees. From the house we look down on it so we can enjoy the autumnal colour and different greens of the natives."

It's that wish to grow a garden that can be easily enjoyed from the house that has determined the siting of plants.

"When I have a new shrub I position it where I think it ought to go, I see what it looks like from inside and imagine what it will grow into."

The garden is one of a number of Jennifer's daily tasks with intermittent assistance from hired help and husband Ken, when free from his legal practice. What started as a plot of colour and texture has expanded. As trees grow and shade shrubs they are moved to more suitable and sunnier sites and so the garden evolves.

"It's hard to say how big it is, we really don't know, maybe two acres, but we are not looking to make it any bigger, there's enough to do as it is, it takes quite a lot of upkeep and care."

From the start, Ken made a rule that no tree could be planted closer than 10 metres to the house, and Jennifer confides that has paid off. When she looks at how big trees grow and how extensive the reach of branches are, she says the 10-metre rule that at one time seemed a big distance from the house is now close.

"The big trees have a reach and root system that is much larger than is anticipated. We are always pruning and raising the canopy of trees but we do have good growth here."

The garden includes a variety of rhododendrons and formal hedging has been created from michella, corokias, box, miro, totara and Chilean guava.

CONTINUES NEXT PAGE



The parterre garden where Jennifer got tough on the hedging and is now delighted with the result.



A scarlet rhododendron blooms robustly against a paddock of sheep behind.



**The Michael Smithers playhouse is a bright and playful addition to Horner family garden on a hillside next to the ancient Puketarata Pa in Taranaki.**

**Photos: JANE DOVE JUNEAU**



An old cabbage tree stands tall in the garden.

#### FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

"I like to use plants with grey and maroon foliage as they go well with the many different greens in a garden. I love astelias and maples."

The garden has areas or rooms like the perennial area, a grouping of heritage roses in another, wisteria along the conservatory, standard wisteria, and the pergola constructed from ponga with wisteria, roses and clematis. The tennis court morphs into a work of art during the visitor season. With children and grandchildren based in Auckland and the tennis court now less used, the Horner's turn the green clipped rectangular court into an exquisite geometric artistic work.

"There's nothing very complicated about what we do," Jennifer says, "I just take a few points in either direction and we strike out with the mower."

Another feature is the Michael Smithers playhouse, found in a nursery in the Coromandel and the couple thought a fitting addition to the garden, in part because Smithers is from Taranaki.



Hydrangeas love the dappled light, their summer colour is vibrant.



Blooms of wisteria hang, their petals carpeting the lawn, alongside clematis blooms in similar shades.



Sculptures are set in the garden mixing colour with form.



A beautiful clivia bloom pops its head out from beneath overhead foliage.

"I like architectural plants, and summer colour from the salvias, daisies, sedum, roses and lupins, hollyhocks, foxgloves and of course hydrangeas. Advice? Resist the temptation to plant Japanese anemones, they'll take over. And remember that old adage, 'one year's feeding is seven years weeding'. Other than that be prepared to keep reinventing your garden as things grow."

Good to her word, Jennifer practises what she preaches. After visiting garden guru Trevor Griffith's garden in Tamaru, she got tougher on the boxed hedging that forms her parterre garden and is delighted to see the result. Inside the hedges are Iceland poppies which are flowering at their best at festival time.

"We think Puketarata is a nice place to be and I am pleased when people seem to enjoy it as much as we do, it's been a pleasure to create and that enjoyment continues."

■ Powerco Taranaki Garden Spectacular, October 28 to November 6. For more information go to: [gardenfestnz.co.nz](http://gardenfestnz.co.nz)



Exquisite colour and form of buds opening to flower are highlighted against early morning sun.