

Perennials with Potential

Ian Duncalf

Parva Plants, P.O. Box 2503, Tauranga

Acanthus. A genus of great shade-loving plants that have been used extensively for landscaping. Newer forms, such as the golden-foliaged 'Hollards Gold', and some of the smaller species, such as *A. hungaricus*, offer many opportunities for more widespread growing and greater garden planting.

Alstroemeria. Long known and grown as a long-lasting cut-flower, the development of more compact and dwarfer forms offer the opportunities for much wider garden and pot use. The success in tissue culture of selected cloning, and the recognition of the potential of alstroemerias as pot or garden plants by the cutflower breeders, will see a great increase in their popularity. The first of these new cultivars are starting to appear from both overseas and local sources now, and are likely to appear in a steady stream over the next few years. The introduction of some of the more hardy species into breeding programmes will also see the range of garden uses of *Alstroemeria* increase.

Aquilegia. Charming plants with beauty in both foliage and flowers available in such a range of sizes, colours, and forms. New easily grown, seed-raised miniature forms are now available by colour, and present gardeners and nurserymen with many opportunities for these small, spring flowering beauties. Variation in flower colours and flower form of some taller growing types, also offer lots of promise with new, very dark, almost black cultivars appearing. Golden and speckled foliage types are not new but offer a different perspective and accentuate the wonderful foliage of aquilegias.

Arisaema. Fascinating and easily grown curiosities, whose very striking and different flower forms deserve more exposure and use as novelty garden or pot plants. The species *A. candidissimum*, *A. jacquemontii*, and *A. sikokianum* are fascinating and quite unforgettable, with attractive foliage and are much prized by florists if ever they can obtain them.

Argyranthemum. The bush daisy or marguerite daisy have been accepted as extremely easy and free-flowering plants in this country for years, but little effort apart from selecting different coloured forms has gone into their improvement. Recent breeding programmes in Australia, in particular, have started to produce dwarfer more compact forms, better for pot and patio culture and for sale as potted colour. This, I believe, is the tip of the iceberg with many more developments in flower colour and form likely to appear in the next few years.

Agapanthus. These are much maligned plants in this country but one of the best landscape plants available. Agapanthus are extremely tough and adaptable to dry and difficult soils, and hardy in most coastal parts of the country, although deciduous in colder areas. Tissue culture has seen, and will continue to see, the development of improved clones in a range of sizes and colours. Longer and more prolific flowering will extend possibilities for both landscape and pot plant sales. Cut-flower use also offers other possibilities.

Blandfordia. These are an Australian genera of bulbous plants whose long-lasting flowers are very beautiful and robust. The species *B. punicea* has proved amazingly hardy, and whilst slow to get started makes a wonderful pot, garden, or cutflower plant.

Canna. These are usually grown for their prolific summer flowering, but new dwarf and interesting foliage forms offer many possibilities as indoor and outdoor foliage plants.

Clivia. Another indoor or outdoor plant, clivia is very tolerant of dry and shady conditions, whose development away from the strong orange colours into the yellows and creams offer many exciting possibilities. Although slow to tissue culture and expensive from seed, new technology will see their much greater utilization in the future.

Corydalis. A long neglected group of plants which have been revitalized by the introduction of an easily grown, blue-flowered Chinese species *C. flexuosa*. Many other species, such as *C. cheilanthifolia*, *Pseudofumaria lutea* (syn. *C. lutea*), *Pseudofumaria alba* (syn. *C. ochroleuca*), and *C. wilsonii* also have great appeal both for their long flowering and most attractive foliage. These are easily grown plants, wonderful in shade with beautifully textured foliage, which I believe have the potential for much greater use.

Dahlia. The recent interest and rediscovery of simple species and species-hybrid types of dahlias opens up an entire new world of this most popular group. Of extremely simple form with superb flower colours, the species types offer a very different free, but later-flowering option. Great for garden and landscape use, and with the selection of smaller forms, prospects for pot culture are also on offer. Species such as *D. scapigeravar. australis* (syn. *D. australis*), and *D. merckii* are two of great promise, and the most beautiful ferny foliage of *D. dissecta* coupled with a neat habit and long show of white flowers, makes this a stunning introduction with loads of potential.

Other areas of dahlia breeding, such as selection of the taller tree species in a range of flower colours and the introduction of genuine dwarfs for pot culture, are also exciting. Foliage colour and more self-supporting garden forms are other areas of attention brought about by the current very high interest in the old cultivar 'Bishop of Llandaff', bred in 1927.

Dianthus. Many different types and coloured forms of *Dianthus* exist, but the current work by Dr. Hammett, who is crossing *Dianthus* with border carnations, has the prospect of introducing an incredible variety of colour and flower markings. The prospects of obtaining more compact and self-supporting plants in colours including yellow, mauve, and apricot, is very real.

Digitalis. Perhaps more than any, the foxgloves typify the current trend and interest in cottage gardening. Other species such as the small growing *D. trojana* and possible other hybrids with it, offer the gardener and pot grower a very different range of types.

Geranium. The beautiful, blue flowered true geraniums, such as the long-known 'Johnson's Blue' (*G. himalayense* × *G. pratense*), have shown themselves to be wonderful garden plants. The use of tissue culture to propagate the more free-

flowering, sterile forms, has also opened the way for more plants of this same cross and others like it, to be produced and grown more widely. The new Australian cultivar 'Chris Canning', is one such cultivar.

Hemerocallis. Hugely popular overseas, particularly in the U.S.A., but slow to take off here. Further work, particularly in the area of longer flowering, will improve this situation.

Cultivars, such as 'Stella d'Oro', 'Black Eyed Stella', and others, with good habit and a long well-displayed flower show, have to have great potential. The more miniature types are starting to be used as flowering pot plants, and their landscape use, particularly of the evergreen types, is enormous. The introductions of the almost white cultivars, such as 'Sunday Gloves' is an interesting development.

Heuchera. New forms of these easy free-flowering plants, have started to accentuate their considerable beauty as foliage plants, in addition to their prolific production of flowers. Many with either *H. micrantha* or *H. americana* parentage are now displaying an incredible variety in foliage patterns and colours, and some of the *H. sanguinea* hybrids have magnificently coloured flowers.

Hosta. Hostas have long been grown and worked on overseas, but many of the newer forms have only recently made it to New Zealand. Magnificent foliage plants offering many pot and landscape uses in a stunning array of foliage colours and forms. Recent developments in flower colours, fragrances, and greater pest resistance, has seen the advancement of many exciting new types.

Kniphofia. Another group of easily grown plants available in both large and small cultivars. The colour range of oranges, creams, and apricots has the potential to be expanded with the glowing scarlet and maroon colours that exist on the west coast of the U.S.A.

Lavandula. These are not perennials but shrubs closely associated with the popular cottage style of gardening. Plants cultivated since antiquity with selections made over the centuries, lavenders are now the subject of more intense selection and breeding here in N.Z., Australia, and most likely in other areas as well. Strengthening of colours, particularly into the reds and pinks, and the production of compact pot forms with long flowering periods are the current areas of emphasis.

Oxalis. A genus of bulbous plants that, while it strikes fear into the heart of many New Zealand gardeners, also provides a delicious edible vegetable—the yam and the national Irish symbol—the shamrock. Many of the smaller growing species are not weedy and are the most easy and rewarding winter flowering pot plants with lengthy displays of orange, pink, white, and dusky red flowers. Species such as *O. massoniana*, *O. obtusa*, *O. versicolor*, *O. bowiei* (syn. *O. purpurata* 'Bowiei'), and *O. purpurea* 'Alba' must have a great future as novel container plants.

Petunia. The introduction of the so called "Perennial Petunias" has taken the world by storm in the last few years. I see the development by Dr. Keith Hammett of the smaller flowered forms from *Petunia integrifolia* var. *integrifolia* in an exciting range of colours and with good hardiness and rain resistance, as a most exciting development.

Rhodohypoxis. South African plants hailing from the Drakenberg ranges in Natal, these small, starry-flowered, bulbous plants have become internationally

popular. The development of double forms, has the potential to open up a completely new and exciting series to maintain their interest for many years to come.

Tiarella. A pretty group of white-flowering, shade-loving, little plants whose recent development of glossy and beautifully marked foliage forms has given them a new lift. These new forms hold their own as foliage plants and the addition of masses of sweetly-scented flowers is a bonus.

Thalictrum. Stately perennials of great charm, but the beautiful dwarf forms, such as *T. kiusianum*, have been completely overlooked but offer great promise as garden and pot plants.

Tricyrtis. The toadlilies have a strange fascination, but have never been considered here to have the beauty or flower power to elevate them in to the ranks of the more popular perennials. The recent discovery of some beautiful, large-flowered forms and yellow-foliaged types, may well change their current perception.

Viola. Many different violas are grown for their flowers and fragrance, but few are aware of the beauty of the fantastic foliage of some species. *Viola grypoceras* var. *exilis* (syn. *V. koreana*) and *V. hirta* (syn. *V. hirsuta*) are two wonderful species worthy of growing for their foliage alone.