

THE CABBAGE TREE

The cabbage tree is the most characteristic and universal tree in New Zealand. Generally speaking, it may be said to flourish in any kind of soil, aspect, altitude (within limits), or climate. To some extent it shares with the New Zealand flax these distinctions, but the flax is not so conspicuous, and has a growth form which is parodied by other native plants, *Astelia*, etc.

The common cabbage tree, besides introducing a characteristic New Zealand atmosphere into any garden or landscape, yields many small berries and flowers beloved by birds. It is the one tree in which that intelligent bird, the sparrow, feels sure with his nests. The ring of dead and the rigid upturning growing leaves form an effectual barrier to stoat or cat.

The uncommon cabbage tree, which one too seldom sees in shrubberies, but which can easily be grown is the toi, sometimes erroneously called the toi palm (*Cordyline indivisa*) and the ti-ngahere (*C. Banksii*). In fully exposed situations, both species must have great depth of soil, for in nature they grow in the dense

shade or with plenty of moisture at the roots by some river-bed. In the absence of any deeply-trenched ground, the toi may be grown by digging a deep hole, filling it with refuse, covering with a layer of soil, and planting the toi on top. It will then grow fully exposed to light and wind. Both of these species have character and distinction and are extremely beautiful. The toi-ngahere is particularly graceful in flower. The enormous leaves of the toi are somewhat elastic. A fibre was obtained from them by the Maori for the making of clothing. The flowers are great honey-producers and hence attract the honey-eating birds, as well as the berry-eaters. Millions of each of these species can be raised from seed which germinates readily and is obtainable from the Tararuas, and on the beech forest on the Eastbourne side of Wellington Harbour. The smallest species of all is the ti-rauriki (*C. pumilio*). The roots of this plant were fleshy and saccharine, and were formerly cooked and eaten by the Maori. Little is known of its cultural value in gardens.—*B. C. Aston.*

Indivisa.

