

# Bigger Survey of Favourite Plants

A new survey to find New Zealand's 10 most-loved plants has confirmed the old favourites but produced three new ones. The survey was conducted through *Forest & Bird* magazine by Prof. Ian Spellerberg, director of the Isaac Centre for Nature Conservation at Lincoln University in Canterbury.

The 2003 vote for 'the most favourite native plants' was greeted with much enthusiasm with 364 votes (104 up on the previous year). The entries came from school children, including some entries which were very colourful and well illustrated, and adults living in both New Zealand and Australia. In some cases the entries were simple lists with no explanations, but in many cases the names of the plants were woven into a text.

The 2003 vote resulted in the following top 10 being the 'most favourite'.

By far the highest score and the same as last year was pohutukawa.

Well below but very close together were kowhai (number 5 in 2002) and ti kouka, the cabbage tree (number 2 in 2002)

With a still lower score but with very little difference between them were number 4 rimu (number 6 in 2002); nikau palm, fifth (number 4 in 2002); and kauri, at six, down from number 3 in 2002.

Harakeke, or flax, was seventh.

The three plants not in the previous top 10 were clematis on 8, the tree fern on 9 and manuka on 10.

A few other native plants were also very popular, including the totara, rata, horoeka or lancewood, ponga or silver fern, puriri, beech species, kahikatea, kaka beak and tree fuchsia.

Why is pohutukawa so popular? Perhaps the following examples of quotes from the many entries gives some idea: 'better than any jungle gym as a kid!' 'Should be New Zealand's national tree. Grows everywhere and the flowers are beautiful'. 'A comfortable tree — providing little nooks to sit and read on a summer's day'. 'They have tenacity and strength — growing on cliff faces and leaning out to sea'. 'They mean summers and family picnics in the shade of massive trees — sand flecked with red stamens'.

'Pohutukawas — bush, beach and blue sea — tuis, a trunk to sit on, a picnic on the reddened shady sand and a boat moored off the beach'. 'Pohutukawas — its Christmas'.

One other favourite is worth a mention; or is it a love-hate relationship? Many people hate cabbage trees because of the leaves which become entangled in lawn mowers. Others said: 'Cabbage trees are evocative of New Zealand. I love the old specimens. At this time of year the heavy scent is beautiful and hangs in the air'. 'Cabbage trees — beautiful and distinct, evoking memories of New Zealand landscapes'. 'Used to think of them as ugly but now they are one of my favourites'. 'A New Zealand icon and great for the birds'. 'Cabbage trees like flax — there's variety and colour for every garden'. 'Cabbage trees — archetypal New Zealand tree but often overlooked'. 'Cabbage trees — the quintessential New Zealand of the open countryside'. 'Brilliant white or cream flowers and wonderful scent'. 'Cabbage trees — often taken for granted — but I fell in love with them after returning from overseas'. 'Cabbage trees — have leaves to make a fan — preparation of summer to come'.



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*Pohutukawa is the outstanding 'most favourite native plant', according to a poll of Forest and Bird members. It grows naturally in the warmer regions of the North Island but has been successfully planted in cooler places including the Kapiti Coast near Wellington.*

There seems to be much support for an annual vote for the '10 most favourite' New Zealand native plants.

Interesting, however, that at least one person suggested having a vote for the 10 most hated exotic plants. Examples

of these included phoenix palms, willow trees and thujas.

There are plans for a 2004 vote and details will be announced in the November issue of *Forest & Bird*.

— IAN SPELLERBERG



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