

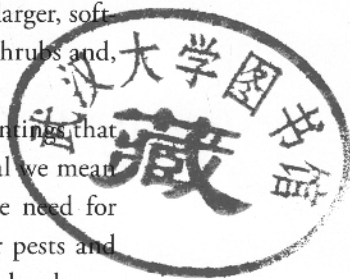
Introduction

Any disturbed ground is soon covered by plants. They arise from a host of seeds or spores, either from the soil seed bank or that are transported there by various means. Often the species that grow in such ground are colonising weeds. Left alone, after this first flourishing, larger, soft-wooded perennials appear, followed by sub-shrubs, woody shrubs and, eventually, trees. This is the process of natural succession.

In a garden we try to control our patch by designing plantings that are both aesthetically pleasing and functional. By functional we mean that the planted areas are relatively maintenance free, the need for mowing and for inputs such as fertilising and spraying for pests and diseases are reduced or eliminated, and, most importantly, the chosen plants do not impede access down paths, block views, or shade the sun during the cooler months when it is most needed.

The careful use of New Zealand native plants as ground cover is a way of reducing maintenance in gardens of all sizes while producing an aesthetically pleasant environment. Like other forms of gardening, ground cover planting will be most satisfying when the garden is properly planned and the plants are carefully chosen to fit the design objectives and the scale of the area to be planted.

Along with good planning and plant selection, a crucial part of creating a satisfying garden is preparing the area. Good soil preparation



Left: Formal arrangement of New Zealand native plants, including ground covers, at Broadfield NZ Landscape Garden near Christchurch.

and eradication of as many weeds as possible before planting – especially perennial weeds – will save a lot of maintenance later. Using ground cover plants will reduce maintenance, but it will not eliminate it. As well as reducing the weed bank before planting, eliminating weeds during the establishment phase and removing unwanted seedlings after your plants have established are the main ingredients for successful ground cover gardens.

There is an increasing momentum for the use of native plants in gardens throughout New Zealand, but sometimes it appears as if little thought is given to the type of plant in relation to the site and the objectives for the garden. Making the wrong choices often leads to a garden that is planted with enthusiasm, only to be removed a few years later because the area has become overgrown, or because the plants are too large or unsuitable for the site.

The aim of this book is to enhance understanding of plant choice based on the way plants grow and cover the ground. Knowing how ground cover plants can be used in a garden will help to achieve the goal of reducing maintenance while providing a satisfying vista. The second part of this book comprises a list of suitable ground cover plants, this not only includes species but also takes into account the continuing development of hybrids and cultivars that are now available to gardeners.

Although there is a large body of literature available on re-vegetation techniques relating to biodiversity and species survival, this is of little relevance to the gardener seeking to select plants to fulfil a variety of functions in the smaller, garden setting. When selecting suitable plants, there are several factors the gardener must take into consideration. Seedlings can be an unknown quantity: some may perform well and some may prove to be quite unsatisfactory. Some species that are fairly uniform in their growth form and appearance can be chosen with confidence that they will perform well. However, for other species, choosing suitable plants for garden use is easier if the plants have been produced clonally and their characteristics are known. For this reason, many of the newer and existing hybrids and cultivars may be preferable where a specific habit or foliage colour, or plants of a known vigour, are required. We hope that this book will provide guidance on these aspects of gardening with New Zealand ground cover plants.