

NEW ZEALAND • AUSTRALASIA

# Ōtari-Wilton's Bush

WHERE 150 Wilton Road, Wellington WHEN September and October to see the kowhai, rata and Chatham Island forget-me-nots in flower SIZE 5 hectares (12 acres) of botanic garden set within 100 hectares (247 acres) of indigenous forest

Richly forested and beautifully curated in a natural setting, Ōtari-Wilton's Bush holds the largest collection of New Zealand native plants in the country. Internationally, it is one of the few gardens that concentrates solely on indigenous flora.

A passion for New Zealand's native flora is fundamental to everything that happens at Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. Originally, this garden was part of a swathe of forest that provided a hunting ground for the Māori Indigenous peoples, but by 1840, European settlers arrived and set about clearing the tall rainforest. Local farmer Job Wilton, however, was so appalled by the wholesale clearance of the land that he fenced off 7 hectares (17 acres) of it, determined that some of the "bush" would escape the axe. This tract of unfelled forest was to form the basis of a more extensive reserve established in 1926 by Dr Leonard Cockayne, New Zealand's greatest botanist.

## AN ODE TO NEW ZEALAND

Cockayne was so anxious that the country's indigenous flora be preserved that he set out to develop a purely native collection. At the botanic garden, sumptuous plants from the subtropical north happily coexist with rare species from the sub-Antarctic islands. Sitting

beyond and below this are ancient and regenerating forests, where epiphytes perch in branches and supplejack vines dangle across valleys. A walkway across the deep forested gully provides intimate peeks into the canopy of tall trees, interspersed with sweeping vistas of bush-covered hills. It leads to the rock garden, the undisputed gem of the collections with its rich mix of herbaceous and shrub species.

Almost every plant in this reserve has been raised from cuttings or seeds collected in far-flung corners of New Zealand. Once established, many of the plants are propagated by Ōtari's green-fingered gardeners and then planted back into the wild. This is conservation in action.

# 1,200

The number of species of native plants, hybrids and cultivars growing at Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. This includes the locally extinct maukoro (*Carmichaelia williamsii*).



Clockwise from top left  
Carmine rata  
(*Metrosideros carminea*)  
adding colour to  
the landscape

The tough, narrow, barbed  
leaves of the juvenile  
lancewood (*Pseudopanax  
crassifolius*)

Overlooking native bush  
that has never been felled  
from the viewing platform