

Linking New Zealand

NORTH & SOUTH

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Tough Times Guide

How to protect your money, your home & your marriage in tough times



men who hunt lost people + Fat cat CEOs + Pantomime magic

the MAD HATCHER

Propagating plants for the world.

Terry Hatch, Pukekohe plant propagator and breeder, can make anything grow – even, possibly, roots on a pencil.

He is renowned the world over for breeding new colours into hellebores (winter roses), creating bigger, brighter clivia flowers and adding perfume to some clivia cultivars. A leading propagator of rare New Zealand native plants, he has a particular passion for divaricating coprosma and pittosporum.

He has been the president of the New Zealand Plant Propagators Society and, this year, is the world president of the International Plant Propagators Society: the highest one can go in the world of plant breeding.

Hatch, with his wife Pam and son Lindsey, owns Joy Plants, a nine-hectare nursery and garden that rambles under big trees, over rolling hills and around ponds. Strolling through it is a sensory delight, especially in spring when thousands of hellebores are finishing flowering and clivia are beginning.

The nursery shares Pam's middle name, Joy, but also reflects Hatch's feelings for plants; they are joy-giving gifts and he has always loved them.

Born in the middle of London in 1939 – he still retains vestiges of his Cockney accent – his first memory is of bluebells in the woods when he was little more than a

baby. Before he was five he grew “vegetables for victory” as part of the war effort in their little London garden, collecting horse manure for fertiliser. And when doodlebug bombs rained down, his concern wasn't that their windows were blown in but that the broken glass flattened the mustard and cress he was growing on the windowsill.

When he was six the family moved out of London, to a village in Essex, where they lived in a house with a large section. Hatch took control of the garden, growing hellebores and peonies, propagating fruit and oak trees from seed and, he recalls, buying 25 silver birches for a penny on his seventh birthday. He grew a forest in their back garden.

After leaving school at 14, he did a nurseryman's apprenticeship with the local parks department; “cracking the ice off the tank in winter to clean pots”.

Hatch was conscripted into the Royal Air Force and went to Cyprus where his main interest was growing wild tulips, crocuses, cyclamen and peonies in the barracks' garden.

Back in England, he met and married Pam and the couple emigrated to New Zealand. “New Zealand is warmer than the UK, the climate is kinder and I was fascinated by the unique plants here.”

Over the years, he has given away more plants than he has sold, but because of his propagating genius the money comes in

– 50,000 hibiscus seeds, 500,000 chrysanthemum seeds, and eight million hellebore seeds were recently sent to an international seed supplier in Germany.

A variegated indigenous grass (*Carex trifida* Rekohu Sunrise) that he has been perfecting since 1992 is now being tissue-cultured and 90,000 will be sold in Europe over the next few months. Joy Plants will eventually get 20 cents for each of them.

Hatch has also been involved with the re-planting of Mercury Island for Michael Fay and David Richwhite for many years and supplies plants to the Auckland Botanic Gardens. “The gardens buy some plants and I give them others, especially the rare ones; we need to give rare plants away to keep them going and to establish them in different places.”

Lindsey, 37, seems to be a close propagation of his father; he's been crazy about plants since he toddled around the garden with a tiny wheelbarrow as soon as he could walk. Lindsey's specialties are bromeliads and magnolias – the latter's breeding cycle takes between seven and 10 years.

Hatch is immensely grateful to Pam for administration and management support, and to Lindsey, who does the ordering, mowing, potting-mix making, and has taken a lot of the other hard work off his shoulders. “Now I can potter and breed plants all day long. I'm a mad propagator. I love the little plants. I simply can't stop growing things.”



Terry Hatch describes himself as a “mad propagator”. He has been growing plants since childhood.