

# THE POWER OF MOTHER NATURE

## Penny Zino reports in from Flaxmere Garden

### Mother Nature has turned this district into a logger's paradise!

Over 55 years of gardening here I can honestly say the last nine months have truly tested the resilience of all who live in our district.

The year began with a severe drought - no rain for 4 months; hot and dry until the end of May when moisture arrived in a deluge! Temperatures were cold and the prospect was very little growth for the winter crops for all stock. Nearly 300 mls of rain in the upper Waitohi river catchment delivered



four raging torrents to the lower terrace of this garden - one ending up in the swimming pool! The fire brigade came to our rescue with 2 large pumps and a sludge pump. Being a white marble plaster pool, it was imperative the mud was removed before staining occurred, or before the water in the soil put pressure on the walls. We escaped that one!

Sadly, the naturalistic garden which has been my number one love over the last few years has not liked it at all. Plants are struggling.

One week after the floods, son Mark's very hungry hoggets broke a gate latch and helped themselves liberally to a wonderful array of NZ native plants! They were there for 24 hours and trimmed everything to their head height. All my newly planted ferns which had survived our summer were gone. We have taken 20 large trailer loads out of that area and spent the entire winter cutting back and replanting. The gate now has a new heavy chain and a snap lock!

The winter was cold and wet which was making up for no rain throughout the summer and autumn.



Next up was the equinox where we always expect NW winds, but not always to the level predicted!

It came this time in the early hours of the morning. The first warning sign was no power - and therefore no water!

I listened to the roar in the trees and watched a huge poplar fall over the lower terrace main lawn. It was dark but the moon showed me what was going on. The skyline to the west looked very different. I could see that my nor'west shelter for the garden was no more, and that the belt behind also looked strange.

A huge *eucalyptus viminalis* and 2 very tall, large Oregon pines had fallen all over the whirlpool garden.

Three days later another equally strong wind brought down a wonderful spruce across the same area. It was a tiny seedling a great friend of my fathers had given me 50 years ago and I was so proud of the way it had grown, and it dominated the skyline for 3 days!

The power was off for 2 days, the whole district was in chaos and it was too dangerous to be outside in winds of that force. We had no choice but to lie low until it was all over.

My two sons and their wives, three grandsons and a kind seed agent came to my rescue two days later. Too wet for a tractor - everything had to be carried out by hand. A chorus of chain saws and a series of motor bikes, trailers and trucks saw 75% of the mess moved to a burning pile in the yard.



The skeleton of the Eucalyptus has remained, everyone is so delighted that I can see it can be there forever as part of the now extended whirlpool garden (left) - almost a water fall of wood which I will under plant with *Carex comans* in a stream like way. It will be ok, and the best bit is creating something positive out of all the chaos.

It has been the farms that have suffered the most. Mark estimates 50-70% of 50% of the shelter belts here will have to go. Remaining tree root systems are weakened. Even macrocarpa and arizonica hedges are decimated. The Pines at least can be timber but with hedges it is too hard to remove fences so all will be cleared, burnt and buried. Water pipes are all in the air in some places,



and fence lines damaged by roots means that nothing is stock proof; ewes with lambs have open boundaries! Re-fencing will be a major expense. The loggers are here and will be here for months. It all makes me feel very humble, as dealing with damage on this sort of scale is tough for all, and the reality is sinking in. In my time here I have seen only one wind that was worse, and that was on August 1, 1975. But it was son Sam's comment that made me smile. He has a degree in Landscape architecture and a Masters in Forestry): "Just remind me Mum why we plant trees!"