

Don Burke says the latest generation of New Zealand cordylines will become some of our most popular plants because they bring fabulous year-round colour to gardens in almost all climate zones.

# new wave nz cordylines

The recently released New Zealand cordylines (*Cordyline australis*) are amongst the best and most useful evergreen garden plants ever released. They provide superb foliage colours 365 days of the year, and they'll do it in almost all areas of Australia. They are one of the most popular plants being sold in nurseries now.

In the past, these sorts of strong leaf colours were mostly confined to plants from the tropics and subtropics, but now you can create tropical effects even in cooler areas such as Tasmania. Not only that, but cordylines (which are pronounced 'cord-ee-lines') provide superb statements of geometry within a garden design. You cannot really fail to notice them as you walk by. And there's more: they make excellent pot plants and suffer very few diseases or pest problems, so they are perfect for low-maintenance gardens.

Broadly speaking, there are two groups of New Zealand cordylines: the low clumping types that are mostly around 1m tall, and the taller-growing palm-tree-like ones that grow from 3m to 10m tall. On these pages we profile the best of both cordyline types.

## CLUMPING TYPES

The clumping varieties have multiple stems or growth points, creating a shrub-like growth habit. Most are hybrids with other species of cordylines (usually *C. banksii*) and they may get crown rot if exposed to regular overhead watering - especially

from sprinklers. Since this group stays low, they are in many ways the most useful of all NZ cordylines. The best of the group in our opinion is 'Red Fountain'. It has an excellent deep red foliage colour, arching leaves and is said to grow only 80cm tall.

## SINGLE-TRUNKED

The single-trunked or taller-growing varieties are outstanding foliage plants. They grow into a single-trunked plant with a tuft of foliage at the top held above the bare trunk. Sometimes the top is branched, creating a fuller head. The green parent species grows 6-10m or more tall. These new varieties have lower heights, but one could reasonably expect the plants to grow to at least 3-5m tall over time (but

plant labels tend to understate heights). We make this point because if you plant a taller-growing variety up against a house, it'll very likely grow up underneath the eaves and look bent and unsightly. Nonetheless, the taller-growing varieties can be pruned back severely, which will cause a number of new shoots to emerge from the single trunk. As a group, these varieties tend to be hardier and less disease-prone.

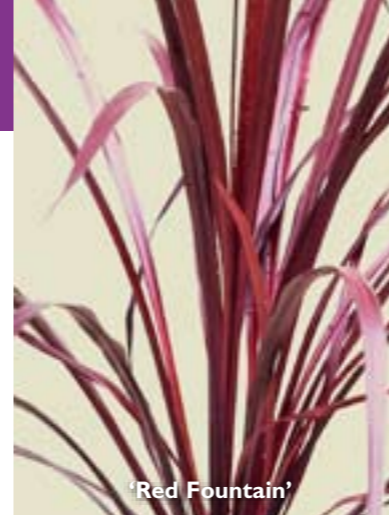
## Low clumpers

**'Red Fountain':** long, thin, arching burgundy-coloured leaves are the feature of this variety. It grows 80cm to 1m tall, spreading a little over 1m wide. Multiple short stems emerge from the base, producing a deep red, grassy look. Excellent in pots (38-45cm diameter) or in the ground.

**'Kirkii':** this one has broad, shorter leaves, multiple trunks and grows to around 1m tall. It has dense, dark green foliage which is not as weepy as other types. It's maybe best suited as a pot plant, and is claimed to be good on the coast, but most cordylines should be.

**'Electric Pink':** this is the most popular variety of all NZ cordylines. It has very narrow leaves (often 1cm wide or less) and they are striped a gelato pink and deeper silver-burgundy. Probably it's the densest clumper of the lot and it grows about 1.5m tall. It's best used in tropical-themed gardens or in pots.

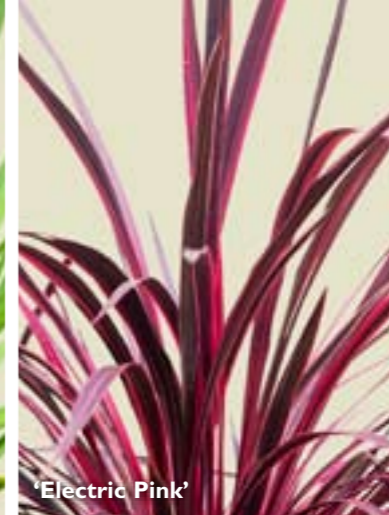
**'Cabernet':** deep brownish red, shiny leaves are the feature of this variety. It produces multiple stems and grows around 2m tall. The darker brownish tint in the leaves allows this plant to mix with many decorator colours. It's suited to pot and garden use in many situations.



'Red Fountain'



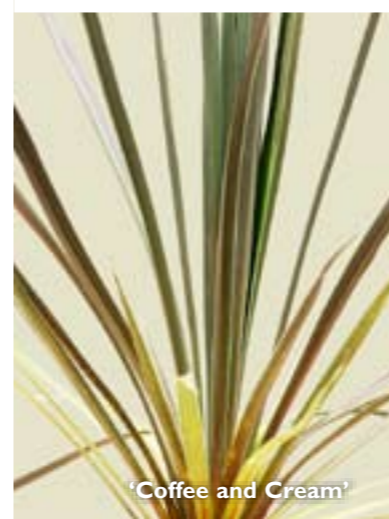
'Kirkii'



'Electric Pink'



'Torbay Dazzler'



'Coffee and Cream'



'Red Sensation'



'Peko'



'Red Star'



'Purple Dazzler'



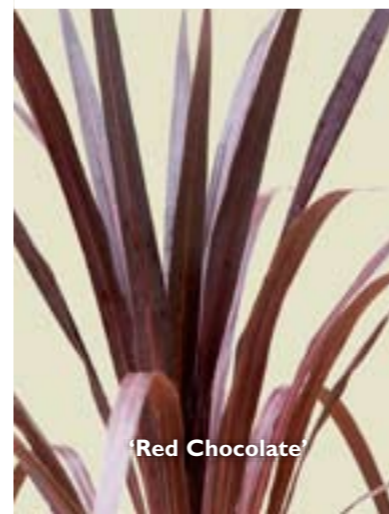
'Sundance'



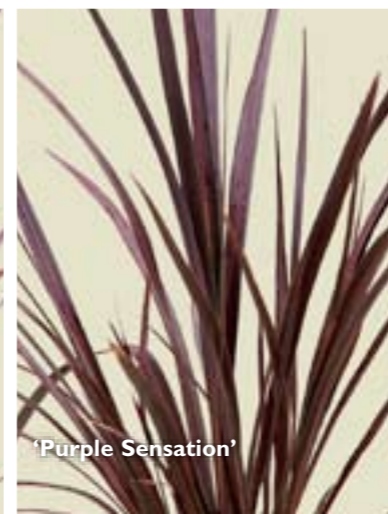
'Burgundy Spire'



'Albertii'



'Red Chocolate'



'Purple Sensation'



'Tauranga Bay'



'Cabernet'



## USING CORDYLINES

**In containers:** these are wonderful pot plants. They tolerate full sun to part shade and will withstand neglect. You'll need to carefully consider pot colours to complement their strong foliage colours. Softer, more neutral pot colours will allow the foliage colour to dominate. Try colours like parchment, beige, coffee, or soft browns. A flat rather than glossy paint finish seems to work well. Look for the secondary foliage colour which might be grey-purple, dull bronze, chocolate or silvery-green. Use this as the colour to inspire or match the pot colour.

**In the garden:** NZ cordylines work best in two

situations - around modern houses and in a jumble of tropical foliage. Used in moderation around modern houses, they add class and style. In a Balinese or Thai style of garden, they add spectacle to the mix of foliage types. Plant the clumping varieties at the front of the garden and the taller-growing, single-trunked ones towards the middle or rear. The single-trunked varieties would work well planted in a group to form a giant clump. When used in modern gardens, they look very good planted in geometric rows in entranceways or in pairs to define a garden high-light such as a gazebo.

## Taller types

**'Red Chocolate':** this cordyline develops a chocolate-red colour as it grows. It reaches 3m or more tall and the foliage is quite glossy. It produces a single trunk with several stout, ascending branches over time.

**'Red Sensation':** its dark red leaves age to a silvery-red colour. The single trunk grows to around 4m and it also branches at the top. Very useful foliage colour and quite a hardy plant.

**'Red Star':** with red to burgundy coloured leaves, this is also noted for its white to tan coloured flowers. It's claimed to only grow to 2m tall, but perhaps you could expect a bit more, as plant labels are conservative.

**'Burgundy Spire':** has deep burgundy coloured narrow leaves which may be retained to near ground level. It grows around 4m tall and is noted for its cold-hardiness.

**'Purple Dazzler':** despite the name, this is another chocolate-burgundy variety. It grows at least 2.5m tall and produces upright, pointed leaves. Like all New Zealand cordylines, it is non-spiny and thus quite safe.

**'Purple Sensation':** growing around 2m tall, this is listed as a variety of *C. banksii*. The leaves are burgundy with pinkish-red stripes. Its hardiness has yet to be established in Australia.

**'Coffee and Cream':** this one has a curious foliage colour; sort of a chocolate-green colour with the older leaves a paler, almost creamy shade, but the bicolor effect is quite stylish. It should grow to around 4m.

**'Tauranga Bay':** supposedly a smallish-growing variety to around 2m tall, 'Tauranga Bay' has green leaves with a paler

yellowish midrib - a good miniature version of its big mother.

**'Sundance':** dark green leaves shade to pink at the base, creating an attractive red and green contrast. It grows 2m or more but does not like over-watering.

**'Peko':** this cordyline produces green leaves with carmine-red at the base on a plant growing to around 3m or more - another very stylish bicolor.

**'Torbay Dazzler':** 3-4m tall, this has cream and green striped leaves with a pinkish midline on the new leaves. The main cream areas are often on the edges and although very attractive from a distance, they may get brownish areas caused by sunburn.

**'Albertii':** appears to be the same as Torbay Dazzler. ✨

## growing tips

Once established, *Cordyline australis* varieties and hybrids don't need a lot of water. Nonetheless, regular watering of the young plants is essential. The best foliage colour occurs in full sun to part shade in the garden. As the leaves age, they may discolour and are best removed by a downward pulling action. Do not over-fertilise and do not over-water once established. Renovation pruning of gangly, tall specimens is a good idea, and savage pruning even to near ground level is OK.