

## Travel Broadens Your Plant Perspectives by Fran Benton

Whenever I return from tropical winter travel I reflect back on the plants and gardens I have seen. I dream up new approaches and plants to add to my garden. This drives my poor husband totally bonkers. He has to say repeatedly “No, you cannot grow zone 12 tropical plants in Mill Bay. It’s a zone 7 maybe even a zone 6”. For those who might be unfamiliar with the zone thing, it’s a way geographers and climatologists have to point



out that area’s temperatures and growing limits. The lower you go the colder it is. The higher you go the warmer it is. Being a big fan of lush tropical plants I always want to grow them here. Tropicals (and some cactus) cannot tolerate the extended cold damp weather that our ferns and conifers adore. I bet you have someone in your family who pushes the limits and then moans piteously when their beloved plant dies. Specifically I am thinking of cactus. Cactus can grow very well here. We have the prickly pear cactus growing on the gulf islands. So why does it die on our balconies here in Mill Bay? Aha! Prickly pear grows on the gulf islands right beside the sea because that is zone 9 and it rarely freezes solid over an extended period. In Tucson Arizona they actually cover some garden cactus in the coldest time of the year. It looks very odd.

This year we spent a week in the town of Volcano on the big island of Hawaii. Why? Volcano is jam full of tree ferns, my all time favourite plant. I so want to grow a tree fern. The local garden centre even sells *Dicksonia antarctica* (the Tasmanian Tree Fern). HOWEVER, and it’s



a big however, this fern must be protected by wrapping its crown over the winter and you better be prepared to spend quality winter time fussing with it. If the wrapping gets wet then the frost will penetrate the crown, freeze it and rot it. If the fern starts pinning for Tassie then it’s \$\$\$ to replace it. There is a reason they are fairly rare in our gardens. You need to be the fussiest gardener in the Mill Bay Garden Club to get old *Dicksonia* through every winter. Now several people come to mind that might just be fussy enough to do this but you will just have to come to a meeting to see who that is! We meet on the fourth Tuesday of the month at the Mill Bay Hall, 6:45 pm.