

1 *Corokia cotoneaster*
2 *C.* x *virgata* ‘Geenty’s Green’
3 *C. buddlejoides* ‘Coco’
4 *C.* x *virgata* ‘Welsh Whiskey’
5 *C.* x *virgata* ‘Sunsplash’
6 *C.* x *virgata* ‘Limey’
7 *C. cotoneaster* ‘Geenty’s Ghost’
8 *C.* x *virgata* ‘Havering’
9 *C.* x *virgata* ‘Pink Delight’
10 *C.* x *virgata* ‘County Park Lemon’
11 *C. macrocarpa*
12 *C.* x *virgata* ‘Sunsprite’
13 *C.* x *virgata* ‘Yellow Wonder’
14 *C.* x *virgata* ‘‘Frosted Chocolate’
15 *C. buddlejoides*
16 *C.* x *virgata* ‘Maori Green’



Photographed 8 February 2018 RHS/Tim Sandall. With thanks to Mona Abboud.

PLANT PROFILE

Corokia

These attractive and versatile evergreen shrubs are particularly relevant to UK gardeners dealing with drought or looking for appealing alternatives to box, although most are still largely unknown and undervalued

Author: **Mona Abboud,** holder of the Plant Heritage National Plant Collection of *Corokia*.

Evergreen shrubs or small trees, *Corokia* are native to forests and mountains of New Zealand, where they are known by the Maori as *korokio*, from which their generic name is derived. They were brought to the UK by Victorian plant hunters, and today can increasingly be found for sale in garden centres. These are versatile and useful plants of subtle beauty and can fit well into any style of garden. With their small, leathery leaves they lend themselves to a wide range of effects created by pruning, including hedging and topiary, but they are equally appealing left to grow unpruned.

In widespread UK cultivation are three species: *C. buddlejoides* 15, *C. cotoneaster* 1 and *C. macrocarpa* 11, but there are also numerous subspecies and cultivars. All have alternate leaves with white undersides and produce small, star-shaped, five-petalled, yellow flowers in late spring, followed by colourful berries in autumn. Some have foliage that changes colour in winter, from green to lustrous bronze, and most are fast-growing to around 2m (6½ft).

Trim them, shape them or let them grow

Corokia are generally easy to grow in the UK, as we share similar climatic (and island) conditions with New Zealand. Many cope well with coastal locations, being tolerant of wind and salt spray, and are drought resistant. They require good drainage and moderately fertile soils, preferably in full sun with shelter from extreme cold, but also stand partial shade.

Corokia x *virgata* cultivars are the result of natural crossing between *C. cotoneaster* and *C. buddlejoides* – ‘virgata’ means »

At RHS Garden Hyde Hall in Essex, plants of *Corokia* x *virgata* 'Frosted Chocolate' have been cloud-pruned to form an undulating hedge, contrasting with and weaving between clumps of *Astelia nervosa* 'Westland' with its sword-like foliage, and bronze, grassy-leaved sedge *Carex testacea*.



JOHN FIELDING





MONA ABBOUD

Corokia on display

Author Mona Abboud holds a National Plant Collection of *Corokia* containing three species and 35 subspecies and cultivars in her sheltered garden. Allowed to grow freely, *Corokia* develop an attractive habit; here Mona has planted gold-leaved *Corokia* x *virgata* 'Sunsprite' beside *C.* x *virgata* 'Limey' (far left). She lifted the crown and topiarised silvery-leaved (akin to an olive tree) *C.* x *virgata* 'Yellow Wonder' (left): the yellow flowers are a bonus.
✤ Mona Abboud, 33 Wood Vale, London N10 3DJ; **monasgarden.co.uk**; monaabboud@hotmail.com
Open day: 1 Sept, 1.30–6pm, Also open by appointment.



Evergreen corokias provide subtle but reliable year-round interest; spring flowers are followed by displays of berries, such as those on *Corokia macrocarpa* (above).

Close-up detail reveals the reason *Corokia cotoneaster* is sometimes referred to as wire-netting bush (below). Masses of starry yellow flowers make a fine display in spring.



PETER STILES

twiggy, which they tend to be, but they avoid the rather tangled habit of *C. cotoneaster* and have the larger leaves of *C. buddlejoides*.

Good alternatives to *Buxus* (which many gardeners are finding ungrowable due to box blight and box moth caterpillar), *Corokia* have the added advantage of colourful flowers and berries. Some, including *C.* x *virgata* 'Frosted Chocolate' ⓮ and 'Silver Ghost', have been included in the demonstration of box alternatives at RHS Garden Wisley, Surrey (see Sept 2018, pp38–42). In my own North London garden, I replaced a box hedge with a row of two alternating compact *Corokia*: bronze *C. buddlejoides* 'Coco' ❸ and silvery-blue *C. cotoneaster* 'Geenty's Ghost' ❼ that I find provides a particularly pleasing colour contrast.

Whether shaped or left to grow naturally, *Corokia* also make excellent companion plants with perennials, especially grasses. They perfectly complement many other southern-hemisphere and Mediterranean-zone plants, but can also blend happily into a typical English country garden.

The most widely available *Corokia* are *C. cotoneaster* – often called wire-netting bush – and *C.* x *virgata* cultivars 'Frosted Chocolate', 'Yellow Wonder' ⓭ and 'Sunsplash' ❺. There are many others but sadly most are as yet rarely available. Some corokias originate from County Park Nursery in Hampshire, whose founder the late Graham Hutchins made four expeditions to New Zealand to collect plants, naming some *C. cotoneaster* subspecies after the place where he found them, and raising many cultivars himself.

Species and selections to try

Corokia buddlejoides ⓯ is an upright shrub, with large, lanceolate, olive-green leaves and dark red berries. It grows wild in the warmest part of New Zealand's North Island and thrives only in the most sheltered parts of the UK. The famous Victorian botanist Joseph Hooker mentioned sending *C. buddlejoides* in 1841 from New Zealand to Kew, where his father was director. RHS hardiness rating H3 (–5 to 1°C/23 to 34°F) and plants reach around 2m (6½ft).

***C. buddlejoides* 'Coco'** ❸ is one of the most attractive corokias. Being bushy and compact, it is an ideal alternative to box (and even *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb' AGM) as its small, pointed, lance-shaped leaves have a bronze tinge, which darkens in winter. One of the last *Corokia* selections raised by Graham Hutchins, this is hardy to around H3 and plants reach just 1m (3ft).

C. cotoneaster ❶ is the most commonly available species. Its native habitat is rocky terrain throughout New Zealand, from where it was introduced to the UK in 1875. It has divaricating, tangled branches and small, spoon-shaped leaves – common in many New Zealand shrubs, developed as a defence against the windy climate and animals, notably birds such as the extinct giant flightless moa. Hardy to H4 (–10 to –5°C/14 to 23°F): reaches 2m (6½ft).

C. macrocarpa ⓫ is a large, upright shrub or small tree endemic to the Chatham Islands, off New Zealand's South Island. It has lanceolate, bluish green leaves and red berries. Endangered in the wild, it is to date rarely available in the UK. Hardiness H4: plants reach around 3m (10ft).

***C.* x *virgata* 'County Park Lemon'** ⓾, one of Graham Hutchins' cultivars, with its tangly habit and small, spoon-shaped leaves resembles its parent *C. cotoneaster*. Hardiness H4: plants reach around 2m (6½ft).

***C.* x *virgata* 'Frosted Chocolate'** ⓮ is one of the most popular and distinctive cultivars. It turns attractively bronze in winter and has larger leaves than many other selections (as does 'Bronze Lady'). This selection was one of several cultivars introduced by New »

Zealand plantsman and corokia enthusiast the late Mike Geenty, who pioneered bringing them to the notice of gardeners. Hardiness H4: size to around 2m (6½ft).

***C. cotoneaster* 'Geenty's Ghost'** 7 is another of Mike Geenty's introductions and a rather compact shrub. This compactness, along with its beautiful, shimmery, blue-grey foliage, is a factor in making it my favourite box alternative. Similar 'Silver Ghost is a slightly taller cultivar, with small, glowing, greyish leaves. Hardiness H4: plants reach around 1.2m (4ft).

***C.* x *virgata* 'Limey'** 6 is upright but short growing with long, narrow leaves, which are a vibrant lime-green. Hardiness H3: plants reach no more than about around 1.5m (5ft).

***C.* x *virgata* 'Pink Delight'** 9 also turns bronze in winter and is quite tall growing. Both 'Coppershine' and 'Bronze King' turn a similar hue in winter. Hardiness H4: plants reach around 2m (6½ft).

***C.* x *virgata* 'Sunsprite'** 12 makes a compact plant and is a completely yellow-leaved *Corokia*, as is the new compact introduction 'Banana Royal'. Both need a sheltered position as they are only rated H3 and reach around 1.2m (4ft).

***C.* x *virgata* 'Sunsplash'** 5 has variegated leaves with glowing yellow margins. Hardiness H3: plants reach around 1.5m (5ft) high.

***C.* x *virgata* 'Welsh Whiskey'** 4, a recent, attractive introduction, is variegated with green and orange leaves. It is of compact habit, growing to less than 1m (3ft), with a hardiness rating of H3.

***C.* x *virgata* 'Yellow Wonder'** 13 is a tall, vigorous and fast-growing shrub with leathery green leaves. It produces yellow berries, as opposed to 'Red Wonder', which produces red berries: otherwise these cultivars are similar. Hardiness H4: plants reach 3m (10ft).

These shrubs provide year-round interest, thanks to their varied shapes and wide range of leaf colours, which may change during winter. They make attractive additions to any style of garden and meet head on the challenges of drought, pests and disease we face as gardeners. They deserve better presence in garden centres and better recognition as plants on which we can depend. O

Enjoying *Corokia*

Overview
Evergreen shrubs or small trees most from high-altitude areas of New Zealand.

Family
One of two genera from *Argophyllaceae* (the other is *Agrophyllum*) a family from Australia, New Zealand and nearby islands.

Species and cultivars
10 species (three in UK cultivation), numerous subspecies and cultivars.

In the garden
As clipped and shaped specimens, hedges or left to develop a natural habit.

Growing requirements
Sun or part shade, good drainage, any fertile soil.

RHS hardiness rating
H3 (–5 to 1°c/23 to 34°F) or H4 (–10 to –5°c/14 to 23°F).

Propagation
Corokia are difficult to propagate from seed. The best method is to propagate by semi-ripe cuttings at the end of the summer or in early autumn in a free-draining potting medium.

Pests and diseases
Plants are generally problem free.

Suppliers
Mona recommends Trevena Cross Nurseries, Cornwall **trevenacross.co.uk** and County Park Nursery, Hampshire **countyparknursery.co.uk**



A purple-leaved *Phormium* contrasts well with *Corokia* x *virgata* 'Sunsplash' (above) in a garden border.

***Corokia* can grow in a container, at least while young (below), although they are best planted out eventually.**



GWI/FLORAMEDIA