

Plant of the Month, August 2015

# *Acanthus pubescens*, Prickly Acanthus

Friends of Geelong Botanic



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The Prickly Acanthus, *Acanthus pubescens*, is one of 30 species of *Acanthus* worldwide. It is the bracts, common to all perennial *Acanthus* that give the plant the name 'Acanthus', literally meaning thorn. A herbaceous perennial plant with spiny leaves, it bears flower spikes with purplish flowers, but has not flowered at G.B.G.

In a 2006 study on deforestation in Kibale National Park, Uganda, it was found that there was a delicate balance between the regeneration of the forest after logging and need for food for *Loxodonta africana* (elephant). It appears that elephants like to eat this *Acanthus*, and in so doing they trample young seedlings that are essential for forest recovery from clearing.

The species *Acanthus Mollis* Bear's Breeches or Oyster Plant, with its white and purple flower spike, was popular in Australian gardens in the early 20th century and is returning to gardens. It has been named as an invasive plant i.e. a weed, in some districts, so beware.

The decoration on Corinthian columns, elsewhere in architecture and illuminated manuscripts, is thought to be inspired by the leaves of the Mediterranean species *Acanthus spinosus* and *A. mollis*. Its use began about 2,400 years ago and has continued on and off since then.



*Acanthus pubescens*  
growing in  
the GBG.

**Family:** Acanthaceae  
**Genus:** *Acanthus*  
**Species:** *Acanthus pubescens*  
**Common name:** Prickly Acanthus  
**Origin:** East Africa, particularly Uganda

**Location in GBG:** In the Southern Africa border of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Garden, close to the Hansen Gates.  
**Time of flowering:**  
 This plant has not flowered at GBG.  
**Meanings of its name:** *Acanthus* means thorny  
*pubescens* refers to its downy hairs

### Geelong Botanic Gardens Map



*Acanthus pubescens*, Prickly Acanthus



This information was developed  
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