

SOME BOTANICAL HIGHLIGHTS IN THE GARDENS AT THE MOMENT

THE NUMBERS REFER TO THE GARDENS AS SHOWN ON YOUR MAP.

Many of the plants in the Garden have been are revelling in this year's hot dry summer. A visit this month provides delightful contrasts of baking sun and refreshing shady walks.

On entering the Garden, enjoy the flowering lavenders and myrtle bushes in the Medicinal Garden and look up for ripening figs as you walk under the Fig pergola.

As you enter the **South African Terrace (3)** you will be struck by the display of African Corn Lily or *Agapanthus*. Many of ours are the more tender evergreen forms which originate principally from areas with winter or year round rainfall, such as the East and West Cape. Many are hybrids derived from *Agapathus praecox* but the identification of different species and hybrids is tricky. The deciduous species originate from areas with summer rainfall. *Agapanthus* is a plant considered to have both magical and medicinal properties by some native Africans. In some warmer parts of the world where *Agapanthus* has been introduced, it has become an invasive species and here in the Gardens the forms known as 'Ventnor Hybrid' and others grow freely from seed and are themselves starting to become invasive.



Above: African Corn Lilies, *Agapanthus praecox* and hybrid

The **South African Terrace (3)** is currently a feast of colour with a huge range of plants in flower. In addition to *Agapanthus*, there are Pelargoniums, *Osteospermums*, brightly coloured *Arctotheca* and *Gazania* daisies, pink *Crinum* lilies, Pineapple Flowers (*Eucomis*), Bugle lilies (*Watsonia*) and *Crocasmias*, each represented by different species and cultivars. These are all South African plants which thrive outside here.



Above left: Soft Tree ferns, *Dicksonia Antarctica*

Above right: Epiphytic ferns on tree fern trunks

In the **Australian Garden (4)**, take a detour down the steps beyond Bob's Bridge into the cool shade of the Tree Fern Gully. This is one of the finest examples of a mixed age tree fern population in this country. As well as big mature trunks and smaller trees there are self-regenerating sporelings. They are all the **Soft Tree Fern, *Dicksonia antarctica***, which is native to damp, sheltered woodland slopes and moist gullies in eastern Australia from southeast Queensland down to Tasmania. Ours were planted in 2005 from a mixture of specimens imported under licence from Tasmania together with younger plants from Logan Gardens in Scotland. At the time, imported trunks arrived with other plants growing on them and, if you look carefully, you may spot rare epiphytic ferns thriving on the trunks of some of the older specimens. Beyond here, in the triangular bed, look out for another species of tree fern, the **Rough Tree Fern, *Cyathea australis*** growing in the triangular bed by the path. This species has a similar range to *Dicksonia* and the two are often found growing together.

If you venture down to the Americas Collection (in the vicinity of the **Totem Pole** on your map), you find lots of trees of **Chilean myrtle, *Luma apiculata*** loaded with white flowers. This evergreen, with fragrant flowers, is a native of the central Andes where it grows in temperate rain forests. The flowers are important for honey production and locally the plant is used medicinally. The flowers are followed by fleshy fruits containing seeds which germinate freely around the mature trees. The leaves are fragrant when crushed. A particular feature of the plant is the delightful cinnamon coloured bark which exfoliates to reveal creamy patches. Luma is an old Marpuche Indian word referring to the orange colour of the bark.

Also here, are two trees of the **Chilean Lantern Tree, *Crinodendron patagua***, best viewed from the path leading from the Australian Garden down to the Americas collection. This is another tree from the temperate rain forests of Chile and it has a number of uses. The fringed white hanging lantern-like flowers are important for honey production and the wood is used in furniture making. The bark contains tannins and is used for tanning leather.



Above left: Trunk of Chilean Myrtle, *Luma apiculata*

Above right: Chilean Lantern Tree *Crinodendron patagua*

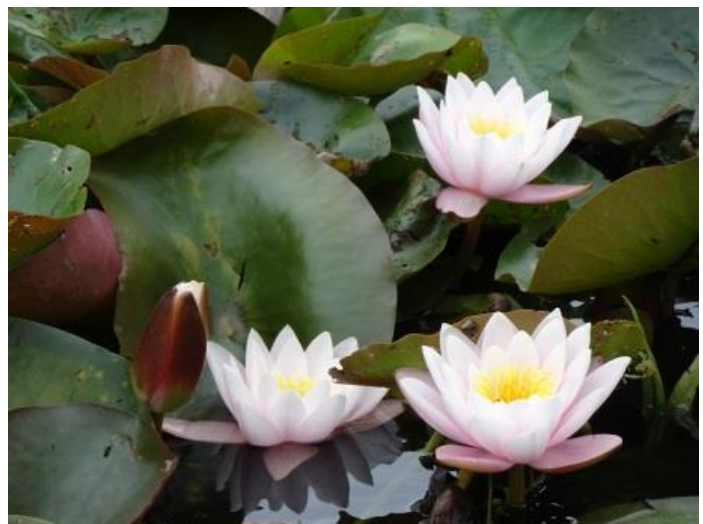
As you make your way towards the **Palm Garden (7)** you will see large clumps of Ginger Lilies coming into flower on the bank to your right. These are the **Himalayan Spiked Ginger, *Hedychium spicatum***, a species native to the Himalayas where plants are used medicinally. The rhizomes are gathered and dried before being ground into a powder. In Indian medicine the plant is considered to be useful in the treatment of swelling, asthma, fever, and pain.

Nearby, on the **Campsis Arbour**, the **Trumpet Vines, *Campsis radicans***, are flowering spectacularly this year as a result of a combination of the hot summer, which they love, and the removal last winter of trees which were providing too much shade. This vigorous woody vine is a native of the eastern United States where the flowers are very attractive to hummingbirds. Several cultivars are grown on the pergola providing a variety of attractive colour forms. *Madame Galen* has orange red flowers, *atrosanguinea* produces dark purplish red flowers, *flamenco* has red flowers and *flava* has yellow flowers.



Above left: Himalayan Spiked Ginger, *Hedychium spicatum* **Above right:** Trumpet Vine, *Campsis radicata* Flamenco

Growing on the walls of the steps leading to the **Edulis Restaurant (10)** you will see a very showy passion flower. This is a form known of **Passion Flower 'Lavender Lady'**, a very old UK hybrid. After the much more widely grown *Passiflora caerulea*, it is one of the hardier forms, despite its exotic appearance. The flowers of the plant is a reference to Christ on the cross, with the filaments representing a crown of thorns, the three stigmas the nails and the five anthers his wounds. The Water Lilies in the pond are putting on a fine show of flowers this year, enjoying the hot sunny weather.



Above left: Passion Flower 'Lavender Lady'

Above right: Waterlilies in the pond outside Edulis

In the **Mediterranean garden (10)**, the bushes of **Oleander, *Nerium oleander***, are flowering spectacularly this year. In most years, only a few flowers open but this year they have really responded to the hot weather. There are bushes bearing pink flowers and another with white flowers. Oleanders are highly toxic ornamental shrubs widely cultivated in the Mediterranean. They have been grown since ancient times and feature in many of the Roman wall paintings in Pompeii. Alexander the Great in his military campaigns is said to have lost men as a result of eating meat skewered on the highly poisonous twigs.

The striking tall yellow daisy-flowered plants are **Elecampane, *Inula helenium***. It is a widespread European plant, not specifically Mediterranean. The roots have many traditional medicinal uses, in particular for lung diseases and as an expectorant to loosen phlegm. In France and Switzerland it is used in the manufacture of absinthe.



Above left: Elecampane, *Inula helenium*

Above right: Oleander, *Nerium oleander*

At the entrance to the **Walled Garden (13)**, you will notice a small tree covered with bunches of fragrant white petalled flowers, the **Harlequin Glorybower**, *Clerodendron trichotomum*. The leaves have an unpleasant smell when crushed. This plant is principally grown for its colourful fruits which start off white and then turn a remarkable turquoise colour, unlike any other plant. The pigment which gives rise to this striking colour is called trichotomine.

In the **Walled Garden (13)** look out for an unusual hemp-like plant growing against the wall close to the bananas behind a bench. This is the **Cretan Hemp**, *Datisca cannabina*, from Crete and Turkey. It is far from showy, producing long green stems bearing hanging tassels of small greenish flowers. It is one of the plants that has root nodules containing bacteria which are able to fix nitrogen from the air to turn into soluble nitrates which the plant can use.



Above left: Harlequin Glorybower, *Clerodendron trichotomum*

Above right: Cretan Hemp, *Datisca cannabina*

Opposite the entrance to the **VBG Studio (19)** you will see the **Sierra Madre Lobelia**, *Lobelia laxiflora*, a low, shrubby plant from Central America carrying masses of orange tubular flowers. It grows along streambeds and canyons and is another plant which has flowers that are attractive to hummingbirds. Like other lobelias, it contains medicinally useful alkaloids.

Look behind you to the bed containing a range of spiky plants and you may notice an unusual arid plant, *Dasyilirion acrotrichum*, which is producing a tall flower spike. *Dasyilirion* is a group of drought tolerant plants from Mexico that produce a striking hemisphere of long stiff grass-like leaves with frayed ends. *Dasyilirion* comes from the Greek 'dasy' meaning shaggy and 'lirion' or lily. It is unusual for them to produce flowers in this country but ours are (you can see more flowering specimens if you look down from the balcony of the Plantation Room Café). Spikes will have all male or all female flowers. There are thousands of them clustered on short side branches.



Above left: Sierra Madre Lobelia, *Lobelia laxiflora*



Above right: *Dasyllirion acrotrichum*

**WE HOPE YOU HAVE ENJOYED LOOKING AT SOME OF THE SPECIAL PLANTS
WHICH MAKE VENTNOR BOTANIC GARDEN UNIQUE.**

**THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW TO SEE HERE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR AND
EVERY VISIT WILL BRING NEW BOTANICAL SURPRISES.**