

Some botanical highlights in the Gardens in November

The numbers refer to the gardens as shown on your map.

Although November can be one of the gloomiest months of year and gardens around the country are closing down for the winter, here at Ventnor there is a remarkable variety of showy half hardy plants in flower. Come and enjoy the riot of colour and interest.



In the **Herb & Medicinal Garden (2)**, you will notice a large evergreen bush on the right hand side covered with white flowers. This plant is a **Solanum (below)**, a relative of the potato. The flowers are like those of potato but larger and much more showy. Solanum is a large genus of plants of up to 2,000 species ranging from food crops (potatoes and tomatoes), various ornamental and medicinal species, shrubs, trees and weeds. Our plant was given to the Garden many years ago and we hold no information about it. Without knowing which part of the world from where it originated it has proved impossible to identify to species.



Above left: A shrubby Solanum



Above right: African Hemp, *Sparmannia africana*

On the **South African Terrace (3)**, you cannot fail to notice the large bushes of African Hemp, *Sparmannia africana* (**right above**). There are several bushes here and each year they survive the winter cold they get bigger and more spectacular. This shrub is native to South Africa and Madagascar and is usually grown as a houseplant in this country. It bears clusters of white flowers each with a central mass of red and yellow stamens which are sensitive to touch. When an insect or finger brushes against the mass of stamens, they puff out even further. This is an aid to pollination, ensuring that the visiting insects get covered by pollen.

From here, you can look across to the **Hydrangea Dell (5)** where you will see a tree covered in red fruits, a bit like strawberries. This is Bentham's Cornel, *Cornus capitata* (**below left**), a beautiful evergreen tree from low elevation woods in the Himalayas. This is not a particularly hardy species of dogwood but surprisingly, considering its origins in the Himalayas, it is very tolerant of exposure to sea winds.



Above left: Evergreen Dogwood *Cornus capitata* **Above right:** Yellow Angel's Trumpet, *Brugmansia* Apricot Queen

One of the more spectacular plants in flower in the Garden at present can be seen in the **Palm Garden (7)**. Look for the tall Yellow Angel's Trumpet, *Brugmansia* Apricot Queen (**above right**), with its spectacular hanging yellow trumpet flowers. The night fragrant flowers of this South American plant are pollinated by long-tongued moths. Our plant has stood outside unprotected for several winters.



Above left: Strawberry Tree, *Arbutus unedo*

Above Right: *Passiflora* Lavender Lady

Growing on the walls of the steps leading to the **Edulis Restaurant (10)** you will see a very showy passion flower still with plenty of flowers. This is a form known as *Passiflora* 'Amethyst' **(right above)**, 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.

Around the courtyard, look for the Strawberry Tree, *Arbutus unedo* **(left above)**, bearing both clusters of creamy, waxy vase-shaped flowers and round strawberry-like fruits. The fruits take a whole year to ripen so they are red when the next season's flowers are out. Strawberry trees are widespread around the Mediterranean and western France and they are also native to southwest Ireland.

As you pass along the **Walled Garden and Long Border (13)**, you can admire a riot of late flowering half-hardy perennials. The many varieties of Mexican woody *Salvias* **(below)** are particularly showy. Because they survive outdoors here throughout the year, at this time of year they have formed large bushes, covered with blooms. They are likely to continue to perform for several more weeks, often well into December.



Top left: *Salvia Amistad*; **Top right:** *Salvia leucantha*; **Bottom left:** *Salvia involucrata* **Bottom right:** *Salvia guaranitica*

There are lots of treasures in the **Walled Garden (13)** at this time of year which are rarely seen outside in this country. Look for the tender, long flowered Mexican Tree Fuchsia, *Fuchsia splendens* (**left below**), with unusual scarlet and green hanging flowers. It is native to high elevation cloud forests in Mexico and southern United States. Another tender Fuchsia, the Tree Fuchsia, *Fuchsia arborescens*, is also flowering in the Walled Garden but the bunches of small, cerise pink flowers look very different from the conventional Fuchsias.

The large Magnolia tree at the end of the Walled Garden is the Evergreen Magnolia, *Magnolia grandiflora* (**below right**). This one is a form called Charles Dickens and it is currently bearing what look like fat red buds at the ends of the shoots. These are in fact fruits. Magnolias are a group of very primitive plants which have changed little over millions of years. Their fruits look very similar to cones but the bright red colour of Charles Dickens is quite unusual. Our tree is a champion tree, the biggest of its type in this country.



Above left: *Fuchsia splendens*



Above right: *Magnolia grandiflora* Charles Dickens

Also in the **Walled Garden**, look for the spectacular Red Angel's Trumpet, *Brugmansia sanguinea* (**left below**). It is the bush at the front of the border with large hanging red trumpet flowers. This plant, which is poisonous, comes from the Andes where it is pollinated by hummingbirds.

In the same bed but at the opposite end, you will find Willow-leaved Jessamine, *Cestrum parqui* Cretan Purple (**right below**). The usual form of this Chilean shrub bears clusters of yellow-green night-scented tubular flowers. Cretan Purple, an attractive colour form, originated as a cross between *Cestrum parqui* and *Cestrum elegans*. Both of these species can be seen elsewhere in the Garden.



Above left: Red Angel's Trumpet, *Brugmansia sanguinea* **Above right:** *Cestrum parqui* Cretan Purple

You can see a very bizarre looking plant in the **Tropical House (18)** at the moment. This is the Brazilian Giant Pipe-vine, *Aristolochia gigantea* (**below**), a climbing plant producing huge maroon flowers a bit like pieces of meat. The colour and smell of these flowers trap unwary flies, which pollinate the flower before being released.



Above: Giant Pipe Vine, *Aristolochia gigantea*

In the **Arid Garden (16)** look for a large clump of Red-hot Pokers flowering on the bank alongside the Tropical House. These are the South African Red Hot Poker *Kniphofia bruceae* (**left below**). This highly unusual species was originally described over a century ago but was believed to have disappeared from the wild and from cultivation until very recently when a lone plant was discovered in its native South Africa, surrounded by a plantation of alien Pines. Seed from this specimen were distributed, and as a botanic garden with the perfect microclimate, the Garden has grown this plant successfully to ensure the species is held safe in cultivation.



Left: Red-hot Poker, *Kniphofia bruceae*

Right: Mexican Buddleja, *Buddleja cordata*

If you follow the path in the **Arid Garden** up to the point where two paths intersect, you will find a huge bush in flower. This is a Mexican Buddleja, *Buddleja cordata*, looking very different to the butterfly bush we are more used to seeing in our gardens. Although the flowers are small

they are fragrant. This plant contains secondary metabolites which are the subject of much research. Some people in Mexico use the leaves to treat tumours, abscesses, sores and burns and recent studies have shown that some of secondary metabolites produced by this plant show much promise in the treatment of cancers and a wide range of other disorders.

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.

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