

Some botanical highlights in the Gardens in October 2017

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

Here are just a few of the many highlights you will find flowering in the Garden this month.

Just as you reach the Fig Pergola from the **Herb & Medicinal Garden (2)**, you will find a bushy plant with tubular vivid orange velvety flowers. This is the Lion's Ear or *Leonotis leonurus* (**left below**), a South African plant but growing here in the Medicinal Garden because of its traditional medicinal use to treat fevers, headaches, coughs and dysentery. It is also used as a remedy for snake bite and as a charm to keep snakes away. We are unaware of any snakes living here in the Garden!

As you pass through the Fig Pergola into the **South African Terrace (3)** you will pass beneath a bush with long spikes of lavender flowers. You will need to look upwards to see this flowering above your head. It is a Mediterranean shrub called the Chaste Tree or *Vitex agnus-castus* (**right below**). The berries have a long history of medicinal use in Europe. Chaste Tree was known to affect the reproductive systems of men and women. It was even used in monasteries, where it had the common name, Monk's pepper. Today, extracts of the plant have been used to alleviate symptoms of various gynaecological problems.



Left: The Lion's Ear, *Leonotis leonurus*



Right: The Chaste tree, *Vitex agnus-castus*

In the **South African Terrace (3)** you will see a selection of shrubby scented-leaved Pelargoniums, usually grown as summer bedding geraniums but hardy here in the Garden. The dominant one in flower at present is the Rose Geranium, *Pelargonium capitatum* (**left below**), so called because of its aromatic rose-scented leaves. It is often cultivated for its oil of geranium. In the wild it is common on the coasts of South Africa, growing particularly well on sand dunes. The Oak-leaved Geranium, *Pelargonium quercifolium* is also growing here, in its form known as Royal Oak (**right below**). It can be recognised by its oak-like leaves with a dark central blotch. The leaves are balsam scented.



Scented-leaved geraniums **Left:** *Pelargonium capitatum* **Right:** *Pelargonium* Royal Oak

Red-hot Pokers (*Kniphofia*) are also showing well on the South African Terraces. There are several species and cultivars including *Kniphofia northiae* (**left below**). Almost all Red-hot Pokers originate from South Africa where they are usually found in places which become damp or marshy for part of the year. In their native habitat, they are pollinated by nectar feeding sunbirds and sugarbirds.

In the **Hydrangea Dell (5)**, but visible from the South African Terraces, one the Magnolia trees, *Magnolia campbellii* (**right below**), more commonly known for its spectacular flowers very early in the season, is bearing striking coloured heavy fruits. These are bright pink hanging structures. As they ripen, they split to reveal orange seeds which are rich in fat and provide a good energy source for birds. Magnolias are some of our most primitive plants, known to have been around at the time of the dinosaurs.



Left: *Kniphofia northiae* in South Africa terraces **Right:** *Magnolia campbellii* in fruit

In the **New Zealand Garden (6)**, there are few flowers but if you examine a bush with shiny evergreen leaves growing behind one of the benches you will see that it bears interesting white flowers speckled with purple. This is *Myoporum laetum*, the Mousehole Tree, (**left below**). The New Zealand name of Mousehole Tree refers to the translucent dots (oil glands) on the leaves which you can see if you hold a leaf up to the light. This plant is widely planted as an evergreen species and for hedging in warmer parts of the world but, like so many plants in the Garden, it is

not hardy. Just to the left of the shelter at the far end of the garden, you will see a fine tree covered in white fragrant flowers. This is a Lacebark tree or *Hoheria populnea*, **(right below)**. There are five species, all confined to New Zealand, and several are grown in the New Zealand Garden although this is the only one in flower at this time of year. The bark was used by Maoris as a source of fibre for making ropes.



Left: The Mousehole Tree, *Myoporum laetum*



Right: Lacebark Tree, *Hoheria populnea*

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* **(left below)**, with its spectacular hanging yellow trumpet flowers. It is on the right hand side of the path close to the number 7 on your map. The night fragrant flowers of this South American plant are pollinated by moths. Ours stay outside throughout the winter. There is also a pink flowered *Brugmansia*, *Botanist's Blush* flowering in the same bed.

Around *edulis* Restaurant **(9)** and in the **Mediterranean Garden (10)**, the Strawberry Trees, *Arbutus unedo*, **(right below)** are bearing both clusters of creamy, waxy vase-shaped flowers and round strawberry-like fruits. They 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.



Left: *Brugmansia Apricot Queen*



Right: Strawberry Trees, *Arbutus unedo*

The greatest intensity of colour and diversity of flowering plants at this time of year can be found in the **Long Border (13)**. Yellow daisies (*Helianthus*, *Coreopsis* etc) and shrubby Mexican Salvia species, in reds, blues and purples, steal the show. At the far end of the Long Border, purple *Strobilanthes* add to the display.



Left: *Salvia leucantha* (purple) and *Salvia uliginosa*



Right: *Strobilanthes pentastemanoides*

An unusual bush is flowering alongside the fence around the treatment plant, halfway along the **Long Border (13)**. This is the Patagonian Groundsel Tree, *Baccharis patagonica* (**left below**). It is a bush from coastal areas of Chile and Argentina, well able to withstand salt laden winds.

Resinous secretions on the leaves and wood make this a useful fuel. It was first described in 1840 by William Jackson Hooker and George Arnott, both botany professors at the University of Glasgow at the time. Hooker went on to become director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.

The large spreading tree in the middle of the lawn in the **Walled Garden (13)** is a Date Plum, *Diospyros lotus* (**right below**), one of the oldest known plants in cultivation. It was known to the ancient Greeks as ‘the fruit of the Gods’. The species is one possible candidate for the ‘lotus tree’ mentioned in The Odyssey. The story goes that the small edible fruits were so delicious that those who ate them forgot about returning home and wanted to stay and eat lotus with the lotus eaters. Ours is the largest specimen on the Island.



Left: Patagonian Groundsel Tree, *Baccharis patagonica*



Right: Date Plum, *Diospyros lotus*

There are several interesting and showy flowers at the moment in the bed opposite the entrance to the **Tropical House (18)**. They include spectacular Ginger Lilies such as large, yellow flowered *Hedychium gardnerianum*, and more rarely grown and tender *Hedychium greenei* (**left below**), with maroon coloured leaves, and the robust, yellow flowered *Hedychium maximum* (**right below**), plants of woodlands in the Himalayan foothills which are always late to come into flower. They are looking particularly fine with us this year.



Left: *Hedychium greenei*



Right: *Hedychium maximum*

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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