

Some botanical highlights in the Gardens in September 2017

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

Here is a small selection of the interesting plants which you can find in the Garden this month.

It is worth exploring a little in the **South African Terrace (2)**. If you walk down through the Fig Pergola and follow the steps down, you will find an interesting grouping of South African plants. Straight ahead of you, you will see a small tree with soft, silvery leaves. This is very special. It is the Silver Tree, *Leucadendron argenteum* (**below**). On sunny days, it glistens with a stunning silvery sheen. The leaves are covered with a dense layer of hairs which trap air and reduce water loss through the leaves, a useful adaptation for a plant which grows on dry, stony soil in a restricted area of the fynbos around Cape Town, where it is an endangered species. On wet days, the hairs of the leaves stand more erect to allow for free circulation of air, and the leaves look less silvery. The tree can grow many meters high, as it does in Abbey Garden on Tresco, but it is a difficult and demanding plant to grow. Away from the Scillies, it is rarely grown outside in this country and ours, now over two metres in height, is probably the only one outside of Cornwall.



Also in this part of the Garden you can see an interesting grouping of Pineapple Flowers, *Eucomis* (**left below**) in flower. We grow several of the eleven species in the Garden. All are native to grasslands and swamps in South Africa and they all have a topknot of leaves above the flowers, vaguely reminiscent of pineapple flowers. They are late summer flowering bulbs. Another autumn flowering bulb, just appearing, is the Belladonna Lily, *Amaryllis belladonna* (**right below**) from the southwestern Cape. These are sometimes known as Naked Ladies because the flower stems appear to grow straight out of the stem. Strap-like deciduous leaves will be produced after flowering. In the wild, they flower prolifically after the native vegetation or fynbos has been burnt.



Left: A range of Pineapple flowers or *Eucomis lilies*; **Right:** Belladonna lilies, *Amaryllis belladonna*

In the **Australian Garden (4)**, cross over Bob's Bridge and continue until you almost reach the entrance to the New Zealand path. From this point, take the rough track back between shrubs leading diagonally up the slope behind you. A short distance on the left you will come across clusters of amazing violet-blue berries on stalks on a strappy herbaceous perennial. These are the fruits of the Tasmanian Flax Lily, *Dianella tasmanica* (**left below**). Aboriginal people used the fruit to dye leaves when making baskets.



Left: Tasmanian Flax Lily, *Dianella tasmanica*



Right: Trumpet Vine, *Campsis radicans*

It is worth visiting the **Campsis Arbour**, below the Palm Garden at the moment, where you will find a selection of varieties of the Trumpet Vine, *Campsis radicans* (**right above**), climbing over the pergola. This is a native of the eastern United States but it is a commonly grown plant in Mediterranean gardens where it benefits from hot summers to induce flowering. In the States, the flowers are pollinated by hummingbirds. At the moment, you will see more flowers if you view the plants from the lawn rather than through the Arbour.

The **Palm Garden (7)** has a number of interesting plants at the moment. Look for the tall Yellow Angel's Trumpet, *Brugmansia Apricot Queen*, 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. There is another specimen with pale orange flowers. *Brugmansia* is a popular plant to bed out in order to create a tropical garden effect; ours stay outside, without protection, throughout the year.

Another plant you are unlikely to miss is the purple leaved form of the Abyssinian Banana, *Musa ensete* (**left below**), growing against one of the garden walls. The bananas growing in the middle of

the **Palm Garden (7)**, are the hardier Japanese Bananas, *Musa basjoo*, and they have been here since the time that Hillier established the Garden in the 1980s. The tender Abyssinian Banana is Ethiopia's most important food crop. The root is the main edible portion as the fruit is insipid. Although bananas grow tall, like tree, they are all herbaceous plants and their 'stem' is made up of the bases of huge leaf stalks.

Also in the **Palm Garden (7)** you can see a very architectural plant with very large divided leaves up to a metre in length, borne on suckering, spiny stems. This is the Japanese Angelica Tree, *Aralia elata* (**right below**). It is originally from Japan, Korea and northern China and was introduced in Europe around 1830. The small white flowers are borne in large umbels in late summer and very attractive to bees. These are followed by black fruits, technically known as drupes. In Japan, the young shoots are eaten in the spring. They are picked from the end of the branches and fried in a tempura batter.



Left: Abyssinian Banana, *Musa ensete rubra* **Right:** Japanese Angelica Tree, *Aralia elata*

In the **Mediterranean Garden (10)**, it is worth leaving the main track and following a rough path on the right hand side shortly after entering the garden. This will take you to two large Cork Oak trees and beneath them you will find a carpet of Autumn Cyclamen, *Cyclamen hederifolia*, growing just as you might find them in the wild in Greece and some other Mediterranean countries. You can also see Autumn Cyclamen flowering beneath an old Stone Pine, *Pinus pinea*, at the far end of the **Mediterranean Garden (10)** to the left of the path.

As you leave the **Walled garden & Long Border (13)** at the far end, you will find bushes which are overgrown by a climber bearing curious flowers. This is California Pipe-vine, *Aristolochia californica* (**left below**). The bizarre flowers, shaped like an old-fashioned Dutchman's pipe, have an unpleasant odour which is attractive to flies. They crawl into the flowers where they may become trapped for a while before escaping, covered in pollen.

In the **Arid Garden (16)**, look for a very special prickly shrub growing alongside the woodchip path running parallel to but above the Tropical House. This is where *Colletia ulicina* (**right below**), from central Chile, is growing, a plant rarely seen in this country. It has an ungainly habit and a gorse-like growth but it bears stunning tubular pink flowers which are usually pollinated by bumble bees but also by humming birds. The spines are not leaves but modified stems.

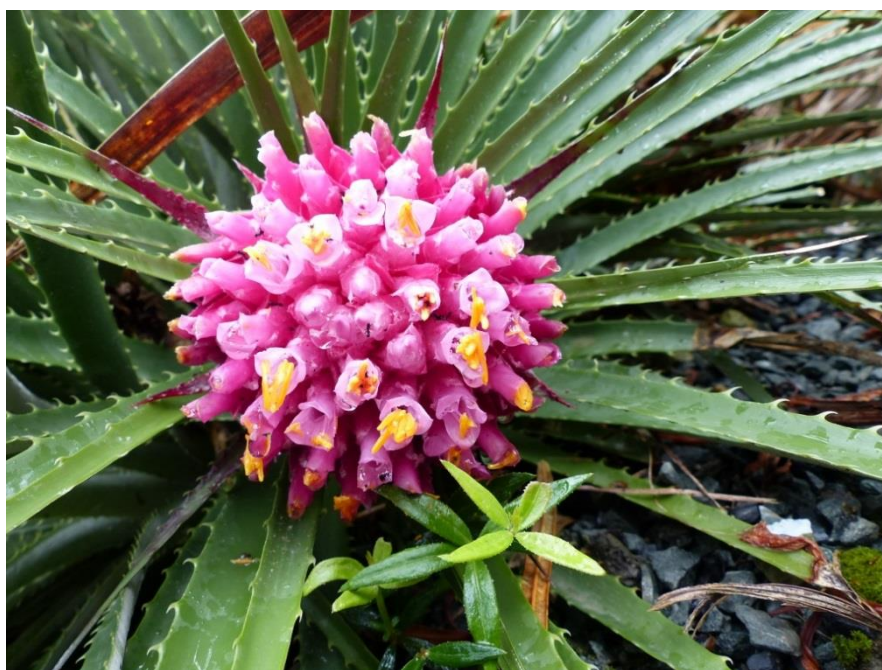


Left: California Pipe-vine, *Aristolochia californica*



Right: *Colletia ulicina*

A final plant to be found in the **Arid Garden (16)**, can be seen if you walk up the diagonal path between the palm trees, is a spiny leaved Bromeliad plant, vicious looking yet with delicate pink flower-heads looking rather like a pineapple with orange stamens. There has been some debate about the correct name for this plant but it is probably *Ochagavia litoralis* (**right**), an endemic from the coastal zone of central Chile. It can grow in dense stands on steep, seaside cliffs.



This is just a taste of some of interesting plants growing the Garden. We hope you have enjoyed looking at some of the special plants which make the 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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