

Some botanical highlights in the Garden in January

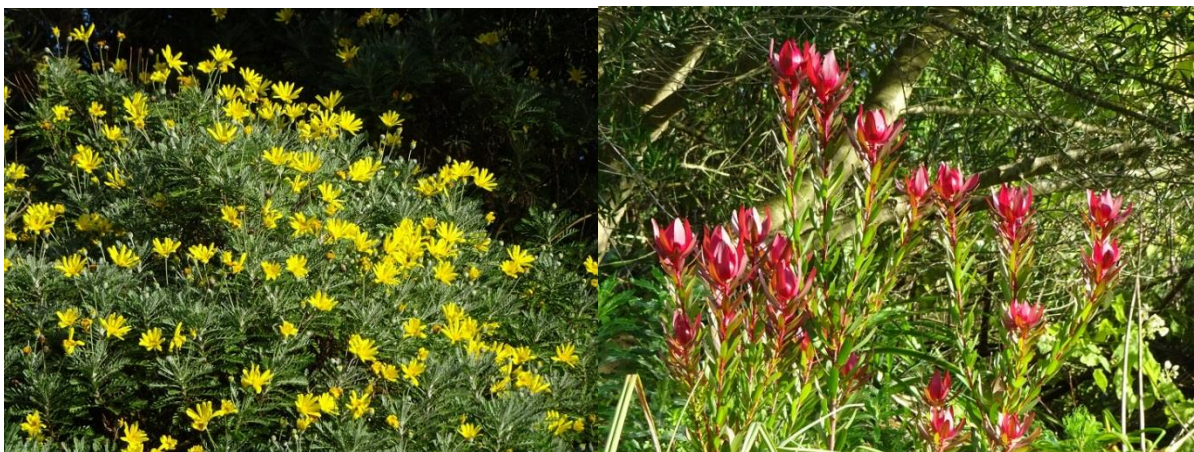
The numbers refer to the gardens as shown on your map.



Left: Grand Soleil d'Or flowering in the car park **Right:** Bursting buds of *Oemeria* in the Herb Garden

The days may be short and the sky overcast but life goes on at the Gardens. The earliest spring flowers are emerging whilst other plants haven't stopped flowering despite the cold. The Curator counted 185 plants in flower in the Garden on January 1st. Winter is a goodtime to admire the shape and form of evergreen trees, the palms and the succulents. Here in the Garden, many of the tender plants keep their leaves over winter.

The **South African Terraces** (3) are colourful with yellow daisy-flowered *Euryops*. The showiest at the moment is the **Grey-leaved *Euryops*, *Euryops pectinatus*** (left below) from the Western Cape. You will also see several bushes of ***Leucodendron Safari Sunset*** (right below), a member of the Protea family not often seen growing outdoors in this country. These evergreen shrubs have dense flowerheads rather like cones at the ends of branches, surrounded by striking fiery red bracts, much in demand by the cut flower industry. There are separate male and female plants and they are pollinated by small beetles. *Leucodendrons* are not frost hardy and they require humus rich but nutrient poor soil to grow.



Left: *Euryops pectinatus*

Right: *Leucodendron salignum* Safari Sunset

As you enter the **Australian Garden (4)** you will notice bushes of pink flowered **Grevillea** (left below) on your right. The brightly coloured, petal-less flowers are most peculiar, each consisting of a calyx tube that splits into 4 lobes with long projecting styles. They are a good nectar source for birds, particularly honeyeaters, in their native Australia. The plant is named after Charles Francis Greville, who was a close associate of Sir Joseph Banks, both founders of the Royal Horticultural Society.

There is an interesting flowering bush to look for at the far end of **Hydrangea Dell (5)** on the bank to the right just past the archway. You will have to look hard to find the flowers! This is an evergreen South African tree, known as the **Tree Fuchsia, Haleria lucida** (right below) rarely seen outdoors in this country. The dense foliage with hanging branches give the plant a willowy appearance and, unusually, the flowers arise not from the tips of the branches but directly from the old wood and hence are often obscured by the foliage. The tubular orange flowers are rich in nectar and they attract sunbirds and other nectar-feeding birds that pollinate the flowers. The leaves and fruits of *Haleria* are an important component of traditional African medicine. In addition, in traditional Zulu medicine, the ceremonial burning of leaves is believed to counteract witchcraft and summon the protective spirits of dead ancestors.



Left: *Grevillea*

Right: Tree Fuchsia, *Haleria lucida*

From the **Palm Garden (7)** look up to the Plantation Café and on the planted terraces below the Café, a particularly sheltered area, a number of plants are in flower. You can follow a path to get closer to this part of the Garden. A bright orange flowered succulent is particularly showy. This is the **Climbing Aloe, Aloe ciliaris** (left below), so called because of its habit of scrambling over vegetation. The recurved leaves act as hooks, allowing the plant to anchor itself in dense vegetation. The Climbing Aloe is characteristic of dry river valleys in the Eastern Cape. The bright orange flowers are pollinated by sunbirds. Growing alongside it is a bush covered in purple flowers. This is the South African **Ribbon Bush, Hypoestes aristata** (right below) and it will flower throughout the winter if the weather is kind. As well as being showy and providing an important nectar source for insects, it is eaten as spinach in some parts of South Africa while traditionally, crushed leaves are used as a poultice for sore eyes.



Left: The Climbing Aloe, *Aloe (Aloiampelos) ciliaris* **Right:** Ribbon Bush *Hypoestes aristata*

As you leave the courtyard with the fish pond and head towards the Long Border, you will see a palm tree directly head of you. This is a **Jelly Palm, *Butia capitata*** (left below), native of Brazil. The name Jelly Palm relates to the edible fruit flesh which is fibrous, sweet and reminiscent of apricots. It is sometimes made into sweet jellies and jams. Remarkably, our specimen is producing fruits this year for the first time. Growing along the **Long Border (13)**, but very much hardier, is a bush of **Wintersweet, *Chimonanthus praecox*** (right below). You will find it growing against the wall on the right hand side. This bush is one of the early Hillier plantings of the 1970s. Wintersweet has been cultivated in China for more than a thousand years where it is much esteemed for the delicious fragrance of its rather insignificant winter flowers. Many parts of the plant are rich in essential oils and are also used for culinary and medicinal purposes.



Left: Jelly Palm, *Butia capitata* in fruit

Right: Wintersweet, *Chimonanthus praecox*

In the **Oriental Garden (12)**, which is currently being redeveloped, follow the surfaced path alongside the lawn to see several winter-flowering bushes. The first of these is a fine, tall flowering buddleia . Its name, ***Buddleja offinalis***, suggests that this is a rather ordinary plant but, in fact, it is a splendid scented winter flowering bush generally reserved for the conservatory in this country. As you continue along this path you will come across another flowering bush on the left hand side with fragrant creamy white flowers in strings amongst the shiny evergreen leaves on a very spiny shrub. This is ***Prinsepia utilis***. The plant, a native of the Himalayas, is named after James Prinsep, a scholar, antiquarian and secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. The fruits yield an edible oil. Whilst you are here, carry on to the far end the path where you will see plants of Witch Hazel, *Hamamelis japonica pallida* in flower.



Left: *Buddleia officinalis*

Right: *Prinsepia utilis*

In the **Mediterranean Garden (10)** there are a number of interesting plants to see on the higher, sunny terraces. Here are several different **Tree Houseleeks**, *Aeonium* (left below). These succulent plants from the Canary Islands have spreading rosettes of juicy leaves; they are very susceptible to frost damage. Each rosette will eventually produce a central inflorescence of yellow or white flowers and several of our plants are developing their flowering stems at the moment. Also here you will see a bush densely covered in clusters of lemon yellow pea flowers. This is **Bastard Senna**, *Coronilla valetina glauca 'Citrina'* (right below), a plant with a long name! It is native of the eastern Mediterranean and, like so many winter flowering plants, it is scented. Citrina is a cultivar with pale lemon-yellow flowers.



Left: *Aeoniums* coming into flower.

Right: *Coronilla valetina* Citrina

In the **Arid Garden (16)**, immediately above the Tropical House, some of the Yuccas are sending up their flowering spikes. **Adam's Needle**, *Yucca gloriosa variegata* (left below) is a variegated version of the original yucca that was first introduced to Britain from the Carolinas, possibly as long ago as the 1550s. The variegated form is less tough and has a tendency to flower late in the season and the flowers are therefore susceptible to frost damage.

In the flowerbeds in front of the **Tropical House (17)** look for a tall willowy bush bearing drooping clusters of whitish flowers turning yellow on the insides. This is the **Honeybell Bush**, *Freylinia lanceolata* (right below), so called because the sweetly honey-scented flowers are a good source of nectar. In the wild, it is found in moist areas such as along streams or the edges of marshes in South Africa. Its name derives from when it was first cultivated in Europe, in the garden of Count Freylino

outside of Turin in Italy in 1817, where it caused quite a stir. With us, it is an irregular flowerer but can produce flowers right through the winter.



Left: Adam's Needle *Yucca gloriosa variegata*

Right: Honeybell Bush *Freylinia lanceolata*

We hope you have enjoyed looking at some of the special plants which make Ventnor Botanic Garden unique.

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