

# Some botanical highlights in the Garden in February

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



Our tree magnolias have started flowering! From the carpark, as you look across towards the Hydrangea Dell, you will see the white flowered ***Magnolia campbelli alba*** (above) a native of the Himalayas. Cornish gardens celebrate the early arrival of spring with the blooming of giant *Magnolia campbelli* trees, the holy grail of Magnolias. Ours are younger specimens planted about 30 years ago but are still impressive. There are several different varieties and they tend to flower in sequence. The white flowered *Magnolia campbelli alba* is the earliest to flower. It will be followed by the beautiful pink flowered *M. campbelli* Charles Raffill and then the stunning purple flowers of a clone of *M. campbelli mollicomata*. We are hoping for some mild weather to entice them into flower!

On the **South African Terrace (3)**, you can find four species of yellow daisy bushes, or *Euryops*, now in flower. On the upper slope of the South African Terrace is a splendid large flowering clump of bushes of **Honey Euryops, *Euryops virgineus*** (left below). This is an endemic of the fynbos of the southern coastal areas of South Africa and the sweetly scented, nectar-rich daisy flowers are very attractive to pollinating insects. Further along, is the equally showy grey leaved *Euryops pectinatus* (right below) with larger flowers. *Euryops abrotanifolius* and *Euryops chrysanthemoides* are also flowering at the moment.



The showy bushes of white flowered **African Hemp, *Sparmannia africana*** (left below) are spectacular. This shrub is native to South Africa and Madagascar and is usually grown as a houseplant in this country. They are sensitive to frost damage and it is very rare to see bushes of this size growing outdoors in this country. Also here, bushes of **Cape Mallow, *Anisdontea capensis*** (right below), have been flowering all winter. This is a plant of the mallow family from the fynbos of Cape Province with flowers like miniature pink Hibiscus flowers.



**Left:** African Hemp, *Sparmannia africana*



**Right:** Cape Mallow, *Anisdontea capensis*

In the **Australian Garden (4)**, the yellow flowered Wattles or Acacias are coming into bloom. They are best seen by taking the track which leads up the hill at the back of the Australia Garden. Here you will find several species in flower at the moment including the **Wallangarra Wattle, *Acacia adunca*** (left below). This one is distinguished by long, narrow 'leaves' which are technically phyllodes or long narrow flattened leaf stalks that function as leaves. It is native to the tablelands of southern Queensland and northern New South Wales where it experiences winter frosts. The most commonly grown wattle tree on the Island, **Mimosa, *Acacia dealbata*** (right below) does not grow particularly well at Ventnor but you can see one large flowering tree as you leave the Australian Garden to enter the New Zealand Garden, by a wooden seat. Although this is a spectacular early flowering tree in this country, where it has been introduced into warmer climates it behaves as an aggressive, weedy species.



**Left:** Wallangarra Wattle, *Acacia adunca*



**Right:** Mimosa, *Acacia dealbata*

As you enter the **Walled Garden (13)**, you will be struck by the bold, jagged blue-green leaves and upright spikes of chocolate-brown flowers of the **Honey Bush, *Melanthus major***, a native of South Africa. Although grown quite widely as a foliage plant, it is often cut down by frosts in the winter and therefore fails to develop flower spikes. Ours seem to survive the winter intact and start to produce their flower spikes early in the season. The flowers produce abundant nectar, which is much sought by sunbirds in its native country.

Half way along the **Long Border (13)**, a flight of steps leads up to the Mediterranean Garden, opposite the tunnel entrance. Here you will see a large evergreen tree with shiny leaves and bunches of small creamy flowers. This is the **Canary Island Laurel, *Laurus azorica***, a tender species of bay tree which is native to the Canary Isles, Madeira and the Azores. It is the principal component of native laurel forests or laurisilva which once dominated the Macronesian islands and coastal Portugal but which are now confined to remnant patches. These forests require warm and humid conditions to thrive; they are a type of cloud forest. *Laurus azorica* has aromatic leaves when crushed, just like its close relative, Bay Laurel.



**Left:** Honey Bush, *Melianthus major*

**Right:** Canary Island Laurel, *Laurus azorica*

Walk along the upper path in the **Mediterranean Garden (10)** where there are a number of interesting plants to see on the higher, sunny terraces. Beneath a big, old olive tree, look out for a big patch of **Bermuda Buttercup, *Oxalis pes-caprae*** with bright green shamrock-like leaves and heads of yellow flowers. It is actually a South African species and another one which has become an invasive species in warmer climates. In the Mediterranean it is common and widespread on disturbed ground colouring large areas yellow early in the year before dying down. It is however very frost sensitive and in this country, the only place where it grows freely is on the Isles of Scilly, where it is locally frequent. Elsewhere, it is almost never seen growing outdoors.

At the eastern end of the Mediterranean Garden (10), nearest to the main building, green flowered **Stinking Hellebore, *Helleborus foetidus*** is flowering. This is an English native species (but not on the Island) that thrives in chalky rubbly soil. All parts of the plant are poisonous, containing glycosides. Interestingly, it has been found that yeasts colonise the nectaries inside of the flower and their presence raises the temperature of the cup-shaped flowers which may aid in attracting pollinating insects by increasing the evaporation of volatile organic compounds.



**Left:** Bermuda Buttercup, *Oxalis pes-caprae*



**Right:** Stinking Hellebore, *Helleborus foetidus*

At the top of the **Arid Garden (16)** to the west of Signal Point Cottage, you will find a huge evergreen bush in flower. This is a **Mexican Buddleja**, *Buddleja cordata* (left below), looking very different to the butterfly bush we are more used to seeing in our gardens. However, 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.

You may also notice an orange flowering succulent growing near the top of the Arid Bank which is rarely grown outside in this country. This is the **Candelabra Aloe**, *Aloe arborescens* (right below), from the south-eastern part of Southern Africa where it is typically found growing on rocky outcrops and on exposed ridges. In the wild it can grow as a much branched shrub. In common with *Aloe vera*, it has wound-healing properties. The gel-like pulp in the leaves is made up of 99% water but the remaining 1% includes many nutrients, vitamins and minerals known to support immune system functionality.



**Left:** Mexican Buddleja, *Buddleja cordata*



**Right:** Candelabra Aloe, *Aloe arborescens*

You leave the Garden via the **Top Lawn**. By the path you will see bushes of a low evergreen plant with tubular hanging flowers. This is a south-eastern Australian plant known as **White Correa**, *Correa alba*. It tends to grow around the coast being very tolerant of salt spray. The four-petalled star shaped tubular flowers shine against a background of metallic grey foliage. Correias are sometimes referred to as Australian Fuchsias. There are several different types growing in this part of the Garden.

Look out from the **Cootamundra Wattle, *Acacia baileyana*** tree on your left with its abundant clusters of fluffy yellow flowers and beautiful fern-like foliage. A native from a very restricted area of New South Wales, Cootamundra Wattle was first described from a tree growing in Bowen's Park, Brisbane. Material from this specimen was sent by Mr F.M. Bailey to the veteran German-Australian botanist, Ferdinand von Mueller. He named it in 1888 in honour of the sender, so commemorating F.M. Bailey's pioneering work on the Flora of Queensland.



**Left:** White Correa, *Correa alba*



**Right:** Cootamundra Wattle, *Acacia baileyana*

If you round off your visit with a trip to the **Plantation Room Café** you can see a fine flowering specimen of the Candelabra Aloe from the balcony terrace.

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

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