

Some botanical highlights in the Gardens at the moment

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

The Garden is not as colourful as we have come to expect at this time of year, because of the late season and losses due to the winter cold. Nevertheless, there is plenty to see and many areas are being replanted to replace losses overwinter.

The **South African Terrace (3)** has been replanted with colourful Osteospermums, Pelargoniums, fiery Lampranthus and Gazanias. One interesting small bush which has survived the winter is the **Confetti Bush, *Coleonema pulchrum***, with aromatic needle-like leaves and small, star-shaped pink flowers. It grows in coastal areas of South Africa where the flowers, which are produced over a long season, attract bees, butterflies and other insects. One of the yellow-flowered daisy bushes is also flowering profusely. This one, with fine, divided leaves, is the **Mountain Resin Bush, *Euryops abrotanifolius***. It grows on stony or sandy mountain slopes in South Africa and quick to re-establish if the fynbos has been burnt.



Left: Confetti Bush, *Coleonema pulchrum*



Right: Mountain Resin Bush, *Euryops abrotanifolius*

In the **Australian Garden (4)** several of the later flowering wattles or Acacias are in flower. The showy one to your right by the path with spiky leaves in whorls and short, creamy yellow flowers is known in Australia as **Prickly Moses, *Acacia verticillata*** (left below). It comes from damp places in south-eastern Australia and Tasmania. This wattle was named by Sir Joseph Hooker, the second director of Kew Gardens and good friend of Charles Darwin. Immediately behind the Aboriginal Dreamtime Rock there is another Acacia in flower, the **Australian Blasckwood, *Acacia melanoxylon*** (right below). The flowers are abundantly produced and white in colour but you will have to look up to see them; they are flowering in abundance on the upper branches of the tree. The tree is valued in south-eastern Australia for its hard, decorative timber which is used in cabinet making, for musical instruments and in boatbuilding.



Before you leave the Australian Garden, take a look at the **Tree Ferns, *Dicksonia antactica*** from Bob's Bridge. They are currently unfurling their crozier-like fronds from the growing point at the top of the trunk. Each new fern frond starts off as a tightly coiled crozier covered with chestnut scales. As the fronds unfurl, the new developing fern

fronds push the older ones out the way. At the base of each frond, fibrous roots grow down into the trunk. Indeed, the trunk of a tree fern is actually composed of a mass of fibrous roots and old leaf bases. This moisture retentive substrate makes an ideal substrate for other epiphytic ferns and flowering plants to grow. If you venture into the tree fern gully, you may spot some epiphytic ferns growing on the old trunks.



In the **New Zealand Garden (6)**, one of the showiest of the New Zealand flowering trees is currently in flower. It bears drooping clusters of yellow pea flowers and is known by the Maori name of **Kowhai**, *Sophora tetraptera* (left below). It is a widespread tree in New Zealand where its Maori name means yellow. Rather like our more familiar Laburnum trees, all parts of the plant are poisonous. Also worth looking for are the flowers on the evergreen Pittosporum bushes. Most easily seen at the moment are the unusual dark chocolate coloured flowers of **Rautawhiri**, *Pittosporum colensoi*. The plant was named after William Colenso who was a Cornish missionary who was sent to New Zealand in the 1834 and was responsible for the printing of the Maori language translation of the New Testament. He was also an avid botanist communicating regularly with Kew. The unusually coloured fragrant flowers are insect pollinated, but they may also have been bird pollinated at a time when native birds were more prevalent in New Zealand forests.



Left: Kowhai, *Sophora tetraptera*



Right: Rautawhiri, *Pittosporum colensoi*

In the **Palm Garden (7)**, the **Japanese Bitter Orange**, *Poncirus trifoliata* 'Flying Dragon' (left below) is striking. It is a small, currently leafless bush with twisted stems and wicked thorns smothered in white, sweetly fragrant flowers. 'Flying Dragon' is an ancient selection of the Bitter Orange. The plant is a relatively hardy relative of Citrus from China and Korea and later in the season it bears small, yellow, slightly furry 'oranges' which are unpalatable due to presence of a bitter oil called ponciridin. Because of its relative hardiness, it has been used as a rootstock for some commercial Citrus trees. Citrus grafted onto *Poncirus trifoliata* are usually hardier than when grown on their own roots.

Growing alongside of the **Campsis Arbour** you will notice a fine display of a blue flowered bulb, known as **Quamash**, *Camassia quamash* (right below). Quamash is the North American Indian name for the plant. The edible bulbs were an important food source for Native Americans. They can grow in great quantity in damp meadows in western USA.



Left: Japanese Bitter Orange, *Poncirus trifoliata*



Right: Quamash, *Camassia quamash*

In the **Mediterranean Garden (11)**, a variety of plants are just starting to come into flower. One of these is a tree spurge, *Euphorbia mellifera* (left below) from Madiera and the Canaries. It forms a lush evergreen shrub two metres high. The brownish flowers are remarkable for their strong honey scent. You can find them along the top terrace in the Mediterranean Garden, particularly around the steps. In the centre of the Mediterranean Garden look out for the **Judas Tree, *Cercis siliquastrum*** (right below), which is bearing clusters of pink pea flowers on its bare trunk and stems. It is so-called because it was long believed that this was the tree on which Judas hung himself. The Cistus or sun rose bushes are just coming into flower, adding further colour to the Rosemary and Euphorbias which have been in flower for several weeks.



Left: Honey Spurge, *Euphorbia mellifera*



Right: Judas Tree, *Cercis siliquastrum*

At the far (western) end of the Mediterranean Garden towards the **Olive Grove (14)** there is an unusual Berberis in full flower. This is *Berberis valdiviana* (left below) from Chile with elegant drooping racemes of orange flowers and polished leathery almost spineless leaves. It is rarely seen in cultivation, being difficult to propagate; our specimen originates from the time that the Garden was established by Hillier. Growing alongside it is another evergreen bush in full flower but with much less showy flowers. This is a *Coprosma* (right below), a group of plants from New Zealand. The flowers consist of long anthers and stigmas and insignificant petals. They are wind pollinated. They will be succeeded by bright orange fleshy fruits, popular with birds but also eaten by Maori children.



Left: *Berberis valdiviana*



Right: *Coprosma*

Before you leave the Garden, look for some interesting plants in flower around the **Top Lawn**. One of these is **Rough Guinea Flower, *Hibbertia aspera*** (left below) a low growing, spreading shrub native to Australia where it grows on sandy soils in open forest and heath in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Further along on your right you can find an evergreen bush of **Yellow Paperbark, *Melaleuca pustulata*** (right below), a rare plant from Tasmania with heads of creamy fragrant flowers. The name *pustulata* refers to the thick pimply leaves containing prominent oil glands.



Left: Rough Guinea Flower, *Hibbertia aspera*



Right: *Melaleuca pustulata*

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