

SOME BOTANICAL HIGHLIGHTS IN THE GARDENS AT THE MOMENT

THE NUMBERS REFER TO THE GARDENS AS SHOWN ON YOUR MAP.

Agapanthus is the plant of the month at Ventnor. You can see them all around the Garden but the South African Terrace is as good as anywhere to meet this handsome South African plant. We grow several species and cultivars but a naturally produced Ventnor hybrid has been particularly successful and regenerates on suitable ground right through the Garden.



The **South African Terrace (3)** is now a riot of colour. There are Pelargoniums, Osteospermums, yellow daisy bushes (*Euryops*), pink African mallows (*Anisodonteia*), Gazanias, Watsonias, blue African Corn Lilies (*Agapanthus*) and many more, each represented by different species and cultivars. On the left hand side of the path you will see grey mounds of *Helichrysum* with compact heads of yellow flowers. This is **Golden Cudweed** or *Helichrysum moeserianum* (left below), a typical plant of the fynbos, the native shrubland of the Western and Eastern Cape. Another plant of the fynbos is a succulent plant with heads of scarlet flowers, **Red Crassula**, *Crassula coccinea* (right below). The long, tubular flowers are nectar-rich and are visited by butterflies, in particular the South African Mountain Pride butterfly. The plant is not hardy in this country.



Left: Golden Cudweed, *Helichrysum moeserianum*



Right: Red Crassula, *Crassula coccinea*

In the **Australian Garden (4)**, you will see a number of brightly coloured **Bottlebrushes (Callistemon)** in flower. Several species, and numerous cultivars, of this quintessentially Australian plant are grown in the Garden. They are pollinated by nectar-feeding birds. One species, *Callistemon citrinus*, was first introduced to Kew Gardens by the botanist Joseph Banks in 1789. The brilliant scarlet flowering bottlebrush on the right as you enter the Australian Garden is ***Callistemon citrinus splendens*** (left below).

As you follow the path round, you will come across a number of bushes of **Tea Trees, *Leptospermum***, smothered with red, pink or white flowers. The common name, Tea Tree, derives from the practice of early Australian settlers who soaked the leaves of several species in boiling water to make a herbal tea, rich in ascorbic acid or Vitamin C. Nectar from the flowers is harvested by bees and used to make *Leptospermum* honey. In New Zealand, honey harvested from *Leptospermum* flowers is used to make manuka honey. You can find more Tea Tree bushes if you back track along the dirt path leading up the slope, just before leaving the Australian Garden.



Left: *Callistemon citrinus splendens*



Right: A Bottlebrush cultivar with pink flowers



Above: Tea Tree, *Leptospermum* Burgundy Queen

There are some interesting plants from South America to see if you make a detour to the Americas Collection. You can find this area on your map located to the left of the Totem Pole. These include several examples of the evergreen, **Chile Lantern Tree, *Crinodendron hookerianum*** with hanging pink flowers. This is a striking tree although it grows better in gardens in western Britain where the climate is wetter and the soils more acidic. It was named after William Jackson Hooker, the Victorian director of Kew Gardens who studied many Chilean plants. Growing close to these plants are several fine Fuchsias and also **Blue Angel's Trumpet, *Lochroma australe***. This is a native of northern Argentina, growing in montane forests. It is spectacular when covered with pendent, violet-purple or white flowers, which would be pollinated by hummingbirds in the wild. It is normally grown as a conservatory plant in this country.



Left: Blue Angel's Trumpet, *Lochroma australe hookerianum*

Right: Chile Lantern Tree, *Crinodendron*

In the **Mediterranean Garden (10)**, look out for the imposing plants of **Scotch or Cotton Thistle, *Onopordium acanthium*** (left below), growing up the 3 metres in height. They have spiny winged leaves covered with white, woolly hairs and globe shaped thistle flowers. The name Scotch Thistle comes from the flower used as a national emblem of Scotland although that plant is actually the far less imposing native Spear Thistle. Cotton Thistle is a native of southern Europe. It is a biennial plant and will die having flowered and produced copious seeds. Another plant to look for at the moment in the Mediterranean Garden are the evergreen bushes of **Oleander, *Nerium oleander*** (right below). Some of these are currently bearing clusters of pink or white flowers. This is a typical plant of Mediterranean gardens but it is also highly toxic. Horses are particularly susceptible because they are partial to eating lying cut branches. The toxicity of the plant has given rise to many legends and superstitions.



Left: Scotch or Cotton Thistle, *Onopordium acanthium*

Right: Oleander, *Nerium oleander*



If you go to the path alongside the terrace in the Mediterranean Garden, you will see plants of the **Canary Island foxglove, *Isoplexis canariensis*** (left) with tawny apricot flowers. This is one of a group of plants, like the shrubby Echiums, found in the wild only on the Canaries. There are several woody foxglove species native to the Canaries. They form small shrubby bushes and grow in high altitude humid woodlands. *Isoplexis* is another plant which is usually grown as a conservatory plant in this country.

There are several interesting plants to see in the vicinity of the **VBG Studio (21)**. You can find **Johnson's Grevillea, *Grevillea johnsonii*** (left below) from New South Wales, Australia. The finely dissected, dark green foliage gives the impression of a weeping conifer but the flowers are unusual and extremely showy spidery coral-pink clusters. Johnson was a former director of the Botanic Garden in Sydney. It is rarely grown outside in this country. Unfortunately for us, it requires an acid soil, something which is in short supply at Ventnor. The plants have been grown in a deep bed of acid soil but their roots are now penetrating the soil beneath and the plants are suffering as a result. Also nearby, behind a bench you can see a large clump of a succulent Aloe. This one is ***Aloe striatula*** (right below), a shrubby succulent with yellow to orange flower spikes. It comes from South Africa, growing in the Eastern Cape and Lesotho in bushy and rocky places. It is one of the hardier species that can be grown in this country.

Also close by look out for the tall, spiky flower spikes of the **Puya**. This is the flower that is depicted on the Garden logo (which appears at the bottom of this article) and we hold the national collection of this strange group of plants. These very spiky leaved plants are relatives of Bromeliads and they are native to the Andes mountains in South America. At this time of year, a number of them are coming into flower. The fierce, spiky rosette of leaves deters browsing animals. Indeed, sheep have been found dead having become caught up in the barbs and unable to escape. It may be that, as they rot down, they add nutrients to the soil that benefit the Puya plants. *Puya chilensis* has yellow flowers but many of the plants in the Garden are hybrids.



Left: Johnson's Grevillea, *Grevillea johnsonii*



Right: *Aloe striatula*



Above: *Puya chilensis* with chartreuse flowers

There are a few plants to look out for as you leave by the **Top Lawn**, on the right hand side of the path. Look for a broom-like bush covered in tiny but very attractive blue pea flowers. This is Native Broom, *Carmichaela australis* from the west coast of New Zealand. Instead of leaves, the stems are flattened to catch the sunlight. The clusters of small flowers are attractive to bees. This plant is not closely related the Common Broom which we are used to. In New Zealand, where our Broom has been introduced, it is referred to as Scotch Broom to distinguish it from the native species. Finally, there is another showy bottlebrush with bright pink flowers and bronzed young foliage. This is a cultivar, *Callistemon* 'Taree Pink', thought to be a cultivar of *Callistemon citrinus* which you would have seen in the Australian Garden. It is commonly grown by gardeners in Australia where the flowers attract Honeyeaters and other nectar feeding birds.



Left: Native Broom, *Carmichaela australis*



Right: Bottlebrush, *Callistemon* 'Taree Pink'

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.

