



Some botanical highlights in November in the Gardens

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

Although November can be one of the gloomiest months of year and gardens around the country are closing down for the winter, here at Ventnor there is a remarkable variety of showy half hardy plants in flower. Come and enjoy the riot of colour and interest.

As soon as you enter the **Herb & Medicinal Garden (2)**, you will see interesting flowers. The **Mexican Sage, *Salvia longistyla***, has spikes of fiery red flowers. The long tubular flowers are bird pollinated and the leaves, when crushed, have a smell of pineapple. The very intensely coloured lavender bushes in flower are ***Lavandula buchii* var *buchii***, a lavender which is endemic to the island of Tenerife on the Canaries. You will notice that the silvery leaves are deeply cut, almost fern-like and quite different to those of the lavenders we generally grow in our gardens. Both of the above plants are quite tender and unable to withstand more than the lightest touch of frost.



Above left: Mexican Sage, *Salvia longistyla*



Above right: Canary Lavender, *Lavandula buchii* var *buchii*

You may also notice an evergreen bush on the right hand side with white flowers. This plant is a ***Solanum***, a relative of the potato. The flowers are like those of potato but larger and much more showy. *Solanum* is a large genus of plants of up to 2,000 species ranging from food crops (potatoes and tomatoes), various ornamental and medicinal species, shrubs, trees and weeds. Our plant was given to the Garden many years ago and we hold no information about it. Without knowing which part of the world from where it originated it has proved impossible to identify to species. Look also for the **Myrtle bush, *Myrtus communis***, in the central bed. This one is loaded with bluish fruits. The Myrtle is native across the Mediterranean region where it has a number of traditional uses in medicine, largely associated with the high levels of salicylic acid contained within the bark. The berries have a strong flavour, a little like juniper berries, but they are used in many Mediterranean pork dishes and, in Sardinia for making a liqueur called mirto which is sweetened with honey.



Above left: Un-named *Solanum*



Above right: Common Myrtle, *Myrtus communis*

From the South African Terrace, you can look across to the **Hydrangea Dell (5)** where you will see a tree covered in red bitter-sweet fruits, looking rather like strawberries. This is **Bentham's Cornel, *Cornus capitata***, a beautiful evergreen tree from low elevation woods in the Himalayas. It has showy white flowers earlier in the year although, as with other dogwoods, the petals are actually four bracts surrounding the small flowers. This is not a particularly hardy species of dogwood but surprisingly, considering its origins in the Himalayas, it is very tolerant of exposure to sea winds. Another very different but showy fruit can be found growing on the bank between the Hydrangea Dell and the Palm Garden. This is a Himalayan **Ginger Lily, *Hedychium spicatum***. Earlier in the summer, the clumps produced showy flowers. Now they are producing spikes of yellow capsules which open to exposure seeds covered by a succulent red aril. These are attractive to animals which eat them, thereby spreading the seeds.



Above left: Evergreen Dogwood *Cornus capitata* **Above right:** Ginger Lily, *Hedychium spicatum*

In the **Palm Garden (7)**, look for the **Yellow Angel's Trumpet, *Brugmansia Apricot Queen***, with its spectacular hanging yellow trumpet flowers. The night fragrant flowers of this South American plant are pollinated by long-tongued moths. Our plant was hit hard by the cold weather earlier in the year but is finally starting to recover.

If you look towards the back of this flower bed, you may notice several bushy plants beginning to die back but covered with hanging stems of succulent black berries on bright pink stalks. This is a North American plant called **Pokeweed, *Phytolacca americana***. The berries are very attractive to birds but highly toxic to humans.



Above left: Angel's Trumpet, *Brugmansia* Apricot Queen

Above Right: Pokeweed, *Phytolacca americana*

As you pass along the **Walled Garden and Long Border (13)**, you can admire a riot of late flowering half-hardy perennials. The many varieties of Mexican woody Salvias are particularly showy. Because they survive outdoors here throughout the year, at this time of year they have formed large bushes, covered with blooms. They are likely to continue to perform for several more weeks, often well into December.



Top left: *Salvia* Amistad; **Top right:** *Salvia leucantha*; **Bottom left:** *Salvia involucrata* **Bottom right:** *Salvia* Phyllis Fancy

There are lots of treasures in the **Walled Garden (13)** at this time of year which are rarely seen outside in this country. Look for the tender, long-flowered **Mexican Tree Fuchsia, *Fuchsia splendens***, with unusual scarlet and green hanging

flowers. It is native to high elevation cloud forests in Mexico and southern United States. The large Magnolia tree at the end of the Walled Garden is the **Evergreen Magnolia, *Magnolia grandiflora***. This one is a form called Charles Dickens and it is currently bearing what look like fat red buds at the ends of the shoots. These are in fact fruits. Magnolias are a group of very primitive plants which have changed little over millions of years. Their fruits look very similar to cones but the bright red colour of Charles Dickens is quite unusual. Our tree is a champion tree, the biggest of its type in this country.



Above left: *Fuchsia splendens*



Above right: *Magnolia grandiflora* Charles Dickens

In the same bed but at the opposite end, you will find **Willow-leaved Jessamine, *Cestrum parqui* Cretan Purple** (right below). The usual form of this Chilean shrub bears clusters of yellow-green night-scented tubular flowers. Cretan Purple, an attractive colour form, originated as a cross between *Cestrum parqui* and *Cestrum elegans*. Both of these species can be seen elsewhere in the Garden. The showy tall bushes of yellow and white daisy flowers which you can see in the Walled Garden and the Mixed Borders, is a plant called *Bidens aurea* Hannay's Lemon Drop.



Above left: *Bidens aurea* Hannay's Lemon Drop



Above right: *Cestrum parqui* Cretan Purple

You can see a very bizarre looking plant in the **Tropical House (18)** at the moment. This is the Brazilian **Giant Pipe-vine, *Aristolochia gigantea***, a climbing plant producing huge maroon flowers a bit like pieces of meat. The colour and smell of these flowers trap unwary flies, which pollinate the flower before being released. As you leave the Tropical House, you will see an evergreen vine with showy blue flowers. This is the **Bengal Clock Vine, *Thunbergia grandiflora*** from India and Southern China.



Above left: Giant Pipe Vine, *Aristolochia gigantea*

Above right: Bengal Clock Vine *Thunbergia grandiflora*

In the flowerbeds in front of the **Tropical House (18)**, look for a tall willowy bush bearing drooping clusters of whitish flowers turning yellow on the insides. This is the **Honeybell Bush, *Freylinia lanceolata***, 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 Freylinio 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. There are other bushes of this plant growing in the South Africa Garden.



Left: Honeybells *Freylinia lanceolata*

Right: Mexican Buddleja, *Buddleja cordata*

If you follow the path in the Arid Garden up to the point where two paths intersect, you will find a huge bush in flower. This is a **Mexican Buddleja, *Buddleja cordata***, 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.

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.