

Some botanical highlights in February in the Garden

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



As you enter the Garden, in the flowerbed to your right, against the wall of the Plantation Café, you can't fail to notice a small bush covered in hanging red tubular flowers (above left). This is the **Australian Fuchsia, *Correa 'Mannii'***. Correas are small evergreen bushes from Australia. They were very popular in Britain in the eighteenth century, grown in conservatories. They were discovered by Sir Joseph Banks, serving botanist on Captain James Cook's HMS Endeavour. This one, 'Mannii', is a hybrid between *Correa pulchella* and *Correa reflexa* which first appeared as a chance seedling in Sir Frederick Mann's garden in Melbourne. It is too tender to grow outside in the country in all but the warmest gardens.

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 right) 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. The earliest flowers were browned off by frost during a cold snap in late January but more buds will be opening in February.



Left: *Leucadendron salignum* 'Safari Sunset'



Right: *Leucadendron argenteum*

On the **South African Terrace (3)**, look for some special members of the Proteaceae family, mostly tender southern hemisphere plants named by Carl Linnaeus, the father of classification, after the Greek god Proteus. Proteus was a deity who was able to change between many forms, apt for a group of plants known for its astonishing diversity and variety of flowers and leaves. On the Terrace you will see the scarlet bracts of ***Leucadendron salignum* 'Safari**

Sunset'. The scarlet bracts surround the flower buds. Below the Fig Pergola, look for a handsome silver leaved bush, *Leucadendron argenteum*. It is an endangered plant from the Cape Peninsular which, in the wild, will grow up to 7 metres tall but, in this country, is generally too tender to grow outdoor excepting on Tresco, Isles of Scilly. The silvery sheen on the leaves, produced by a dense covering of velvety hairs, shows up well in low winter sunlight.



Left: *Hebe macrocarpa*

Right: Mousehole Tree, *Myoporum laetum*

As you enter the **New Zealand Garden (6)**, on your left you will see a Hebe bush with white flowers. This one is *Hebe macrocarpa*. It hails from North Island, NZ, and is noteworthy for being winter flowering. More challenging to find, are the small but beautiful flowers of the **Mousehole Tree, *Myoporum laetum***. You will find a small tree of this evergreen in the border to the right of the entrance. Its common name, Mousehole Tree, derives from the small translucent dots in the leaves, seen by holding a leaf up to the light. The small white flowers, spotted with purple, are attractive to insects. The whole plant is poisonous, containing a liver toxin.



Left: *Abutilon* 'Red Bells'

Right: *Abutilon* 'Canary Bird'

In the **Palm Garden (7)** you can find two different *Abutilon*s in flower. They tend to produce flowers throughout most of the year. 'Canary Bird', with yellow flowers, is in the main flower bed. 'Red Bells' is growing by the path from the Palm Garden to the Campsis Arbour. Ours is a particularly fine form.



Left: *Cestrum fasciculatum* 'Newellii'

Right: Canary Island Laurel, *Laurus azorica*

In the **Long Border (13)**, against the wall, you will notice a bush bearing clusters of tubular red flowers at the ends of the stems giving a hint of warmer climes. This is *Cestrum fasciculatum* 'Newellii', a member of the Nightshade family from central Mexico. Half way along the Long Border, 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 **Azores 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: *Clematis napaulensis*

Right: Lenten Rose, *Helleborus orientalis*

The winter flowering **Nepal Clematis, *Clematis napaulensis***, will be something of a challenge to find, even though it is covered in flowers at present. It is growing against the back wall of the **Walled Garden (13)** at the furthest end of the Garden. This Clematis loses all its foliage in late spring and early summer so that throughout the summer months it looks dead. The leaves do not show until late autumn and then, in the winter, it produces large clusters of scented creamy pendulous flowers with attractive purplish red stamens. This plant comes from Nepal and parts of southern China. If you walk up the wooded path by the side of the Garden, you will notice that the Hellebores are coming into flower.



Left: *Grevillea johnsonii*

Right: *Grevillea 'Florinda'*

We finish with two more members of the Proteacea, these ones from Australia. Grevilleas were named in honour of Sir Charles Greville, a close friend of Sir Joseph Banks. In the flowerbed outside of the Tropical House (18) you will see an unusual Grevillea with long, narrow leaves. This is *Grevillea johnsonii*, a species from New South Wales. It is rarely grown outside in this country. In a flowerbed by the Top Lawn you will see another striking Grevillea. This one is *Grevillea 'Florinda'*. It has rosemary-like foliage and very showy flowers.

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. Look out also for the robins, one of which will probably visit you during your tour of the Garden.

