

### Some botanical highlights in the Gardens at the moment

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

May is the perfect time to visit and admire the signature plant of the Garden, the shrubby Echiiums which will be flowering at their peak. You will find examples all over the Garden but the best show is at the far end of the Mediterranean Garden (11). Shrubby Echiiums come from the Canaries and Madeira and they produce towering spikes of flowers, much loved by bees. There are a number of different species found on different islands and at different altitudes. When brought together, as they have been here at Ventnor, many of them cross pollinate so that we have a real mix of hybrids. They vary in colour from intense blue, through blue-grey, pink and white and in growth form from a tall, single stems to much branched shrubs.



Apart from the Echiiums, there is much else to enjoy in the Garden. The **South African Terrace (3)** is a riot of colour with Osteospermums, Pelargoniums, fiery Lampranthus and Gazanias, Red-hot Pokers and yellow, bushy Euryops. At the moment, the intense magenta flowers of **Cooper's Ice Plant, *Delosperma cooperi*** are making a fine show. It is a mat forming succulent which thrives under hot, dry conditions. An interesting small bush to look out for, rarely seen in this county, 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.





**Left:** Cooper's Ice Plant, *Delosperma cooperi*

**Right:** Confetti Bush, *Coleonema pulchrum*

There are two interesting but easily overlooked bushes flowering to the immediate left of the small walled seating area in the South Africa garden. One of these is the **African Peach, *Kiggelaria africana***. It is currently producing small clusters of tiny, bell-shaped flowers but it is a relatively inconspicuous bush. In the autumn it produces hard, knobby fruits which split to reveal shiny black seeds coated in an oily red coat. There is a belief amongst native people that touching the tree will attract lightning but some people prepare a medicine from it to protect their livestock enclosures. A second unusual shrub is bearing yellow pom-pom flowers. This one is not a South African plant but a native of Chile. It is known there as **Mitque, *Podanthes ovatifolius***. It is a shrubby member of the daisy family. It has traditional medicinal uses amongst which, apparently, it was used for the treatment of gonorrhoea and urinary tract infections. This plant is very rarely grown in this country but a good plant of it can be seen in Chelsea Physic Garden in London.



**Left:** African Peach, *Kiggelaria africana*

**Right:** Mitque, *Podanthes ovatifolius*

In the **Australian Garden (4)** the late flowering wattle 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***. 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. On the opposite side of the path, you can see bushes of **Coastal Rosemary, *Westringia fruticosa***. This coastal plant has a long flowering season. Westringia is a member of the mint family but the common name Coastal Rosemary is misleading, referring to the general appearance of the plant. It is not edible and the leaves have only a faint aroma.





**Left:** Prickly Moses, *Acacia verticillata*

**Right:** Coastal Rosemary, *Westringia fruticosa*

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***. It is one of several New Zealand species and 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.

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:** Kowhai, *Sophora tetraptera*

**Right:** Quamash, *Camassia quamash*

The **Mediterranean Garden (11)** is at its most colourful at this time of year. Spring is the main flowering season in the Mediterranean, before the really hot, dry weather kicks in. Maquis scrubland is awash with Cistus, Rosemary, Lavender, Euphorbia and Phlomis and full of insect life. Our Mediterranean Garden mimics the natural scrubland of the Mediterranean and on a warm sunny day at this time of year you can enjoy the sights and aromatic scents so typical of the Mediterranean. In the centre of the Mediterranean Garden look out for the **Judas Tree, *Cercis siliquastrum***, 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.



**Left:** Cistus and Phlomis in the Mediterranean Garden

**Right:** Judas Tree, *Cercis siliquastrum*

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, *Melianthus 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. The flowers produce abundant nectar, which are sought by sunbirds in its native country. Also in the Walled Garden, a very large bush of **Chinese Hawthorn, *Photinia serrulata***, is now in full bloom. Apricot coloured shuttles of young leaves are followed by frothy white flowers which look and smell rather like Hawthorn blossom. Photinia Red Robin is commonly grown in gardens. The particular form in the Walled Garden is spectacular and is not commonly seen in cultivation. Our specimen is an old Sir Harold Hillier plant from the 1970s.





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

**Right:** Chinese Hawthorn, *Photinia serrulata*

Before you leave the Garden, look for some interesting plants in flower around the **Top Lawn**. One particularly interesting plant is worth looking for but easily missed. It is an Australian Banksia flowering on the right hand side of the path as you enter the top lawn. This is **Heath-leaved Banksia**, ***Banksia ericifolia***. Its distinctive orange inflorescences contrast with the green, fine-leaved heathy foliage. This plant was one of the original Banksia species collected by Joseph Banks around Botany Bay in 1770, naturalist on James Cook's Endeavour. It was named by Carl Linnaeus the Younger, son of Carl Linnaeus, in 1782.



Heath-leaved Banksia, *Banksia ericifolia*

Another plant to look out for in the border around the Top Lawn is **Rough Guinea Flower**, ***Hibbertia aspera***, 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***, 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*

We hope you have enjoyed looking at some of our special plants which make Ventnor Botanic Garden unique. Do come again; there is always something new and interesting to see.