

## Some botanical highlights in July in the Gardens

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** is now a riot of colour. There are Pelargoniums, Osteospermums, yellow daisy bushes (*Euryops*), pink African mallows (*Anisodonte*), Gazanias, Red-hot Pokers 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 moesianum*, a typical plant of the fynbos, the native shrubland of the Western and Eastern Cape. You will also notice **Watsonias**, plants which grow from corms with lance-shaped leaves and flower spikes bearing curved, tubular flowers in red, pink or orange. There are many different species of Watsonia found in the fynbos in South Africa; several are grown in the Garden. Many are frost tender in this country. In the wild, they are pollinated by sunbirds.



**Left:** Golden Cudweed, *Helichrysum moesianum*



**Right:** *Watsonia* species

You may also notice succulent plants growing and flowering on the rock outcrops. There is a large expanse of juicy Hottentot Fig, *Carpobrotus edulis*, but you will also see an orange flowering plant with mottled leaves. This is the **Soap Aloe, *Aloe maculata***, so-called because the sap makes a soapy lather in water and was traditionally used as a form of soap for washing. It is widely planted in warm desert regions across the world as a landscape plant. The Latin name *maculata* refers to the speckled or marked leaves.

Another plant of the fynbos is a succulent plant with heads of scarlet flowers, **Red Crassula, *Crassula coccinea***. 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 but it grows well outside on the Isles of Scilly.



**Left:** *Aloe maculata*



**Right:** Red Crassula, *Crassula coccinea*

In the **Australian Garden**, a number of brightly coloured **Bottlebrushes (*Callistemon*)** continue to provide spectacular colour. 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***. The pink flowered bush is a form of *Callistemon macropunctatus*.



**Left:** *Callistemon citrinus splendens*



**Right:** *Callistemon macropunctatus*, pink flowered form

You will also 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.



Tea Trees, *Leptospermum*, Burgundy Queen on the right

There are some interesting plants from South America to see if you make a detour to the Americas Collection. You can reach this area by turning left at the end of the Australia Section, just before the New Zealand Garden, and walking down the slope. On your left you will pass a spectacular flowering *Puya* for which this Garden holds the national collection. At the bottom of the slope, turn left and follow the path round. Here you will find 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. You can find another splendid specimen of *Lochroma* by the southern mid-exit of the New Zealand Garden.



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

**Right:** Chile Lantern Tree, *Crinodendron hookerianum*

As you enter the **Palm Garden**, look for the **Red Bolivian Fuchsia, *Fuchsia boliviana***. This shrubby fuchsia produces exotic, hanging clusters of four inch vibrant fluorescent red trumpet shaped blooms. It comes from the cool cloud forests of Bolivia and southern Peru. The ancient Incas cultivated this plant and the fruits are still sold in South American markets today. It is generally grown in a conservatory in this country.

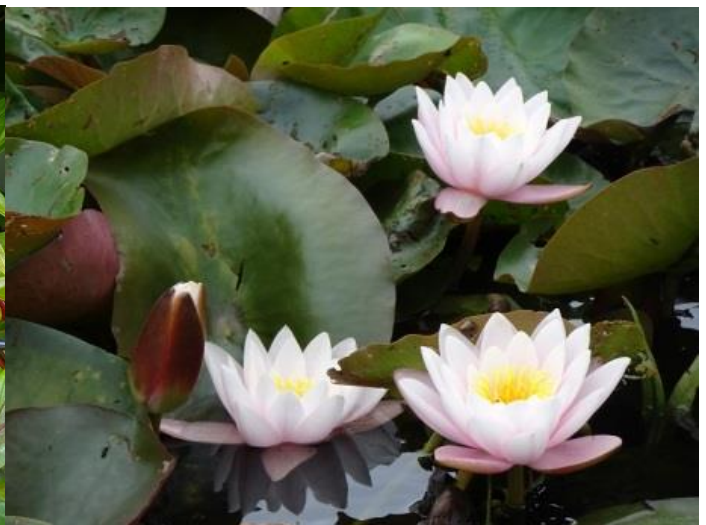
As you leave the Palm Garden through the archway into the courtyard, on your immediate left you will see a small **Mandarin tree, *Citrus reticulata***. It is covered with fragrant white flowers and also bears a few unripe fruits. These are generally not grown outdoors in this country but ours have survived several winters outside. Reddish-orange mandarin cultivars are marketed as tangerines.



**Left:** Bolivian Fuchsia, *Fuchsia boliviana*

**Right:** Mandarin, *Citrus reticulata*

Growing on the walls of the steps leading to the **Edulis Restaurant (10)** you will see a very showy passion flower. This is a form known of **Passion Flower 'Lavender Lady'**, a very old UK hybrid. After the much more widely grown *Passiflora caerulea*, it is one of the hardier forms, despite its exotic appearance. The flowers of the plant is a reference to Christ on the cross, with the filaments representing a crown of thorns, the three stigmas the nails and the five anthers his wounds. The Water Lilies in the pond are putting on a fine show of flowers this year, enjoying the hot sunny weather. Look for our two resident Red-eared Terrapins in the Waterlily Pond.



**Left:** Passionflower, *Passiflora* 'Lavender Lady'

In the **Mediterranean Garden**, go up the steps to the path alongside the terrace where you will see plants of the **Canary Island foxglove, *Isoplexis canariensis*** 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.

Close to the steps up to the Tropical House is a splendid shrubby Echium producing woody, branched stems giving rise to a mound of foliage and tight spikes of bright blue flowers. This is ***Echium candicans*** from Madeira, where it is known as the Pride of Madeira.



**Left:** Canary Island Foxglove, *Isoplexis canariensis*

**Right:** Pride of Madeira, *Echium candicans*

In the **Walled Garden** towards the end of the Long Border, in the corner to the right of the big clump of bananas, you will see a **Chinese Parasol Tree**, *Firmiana simplex*, in flower. Rarely grown in this country, ours is a champion, the largest specimen in this country. It requires hot summers and good shelter to grow well in this country. The flowers are scented but the fragrance apparently varies with the weather and the time of day. Separate male and female flowers are borne on the same plant. The timber from this tree is used for making soundboards of several Chinese instruments.

Nearby, a deciduous climber covered with purple flowers is the **Silk Vine**, *Periploca graeca*. It hails from southern Europe and the Middle East. The milk that exudes from the broken stems is poisonous and in the south of Europe it is believed to be injurious to health to inhale the heavy odour of the flowers. The burgundy flowers are succeeded by long narrow seedpods which open to release silky seeds.



**Left:** Chinese Parasol Tree, *Firmiana simplex*

**Right:** Silk Vine, *Periploca graeca*

There are several interesting plants to see in the vicinity of the **Tropical House**. You can find **Johnson's Grevillea**, *Grevillea johnsonii* 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.

Also nearby, behind a bench you can see a large clump of a succulent Aloe. This one is *Aloe striatula*, 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.



**Left:** Johnson's Grevillea, *Grevillea johnsonii*



**Right:** *Aloe striatula*

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.