

# Some botanical highlights in the Gardens in August 2017

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

The plant of the moment in August is the African Corn Lily or *Agapanthus*. You can find them throughout the Garden. There are a range of spectacularly showy species, hybrids and cultivars flowering throughout the Garden this month in various shades of blue and white.

Many of ours are the more tender evergreen forms which originate principally from areas with winter or year round rainfall, such as the East and West Cape. Many are hybrids derived from *Agapanthus praecox* but the identification of different species and hybrids is tricky. The deciduous species originate from areas with summer rainfall. *Agapanthus* is a plant considered to have both magical and medicinal properties by some native Africans. In some warmer parts of the world where *Agapanthus* has been introduced, it has become an invasive species and here in the Gardens the forms known as 'Ventnor Hybrid' and others grow freely from seed and are themselves starting to become invasive.



**Above:** African Corn Lilies, *Agapanthus praecox* and hybrid

The **South African Terrace (3)** is currently a riot of colour with a huge range of plants in flower. In addition to *Agapanthus*, there are Pelargoniums, Osteospermums, brightly coloured *Arctotheca* daisies, pink *Crinum* lilies, Bugle lilies (*Watsonia*), Red-hot poker (*Kniphofia*) and *Crocasmias*, each represented by different species and cultivars. These are all South African plants which thrive outside here. Elsewhere, Pelargoniums (or geraniums as we often call them) are generally grown as bedding plants. Here, striking species such as the Zoned Pelargonium, *Pelargonium zonale* (**Left Below**), the cultivar Royal Oak and scented-leaved pelargoniums grow outside throughout the year. The Zoned Pelargonium is a wild South African shrubby species from which many of the cultivated zonal pelargoniums and hybrids are derived. You can see them on the bank on the left hand side of the path.

Further along, by the path side on the left, you will see the succulent Red Crassula, *Crassula coccinea* (**Right Below**), which occurs naturally on rocky outcrops in the South Cape. The brilliant red flowers are pollinated by a striking large butterfly called the Table Mountain Beauty. The flower was named by the botanist Rudolph Marloth and he explained that 'the dazzling brightness of the flower is principally due to the dome-shaped form of the epidermal cells, each acting like a combination of a convex lens with a concave reflector.'





**Left:** Zoned Pelargonium, *Pelargonium zonale*

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

If you venture down to the Americas Collection (**in the vicinity of the Totem Pole on your map**), you find lots of trees of Chilean myrtle, *Luma apiculata* (**Left Below**), loaded with white flowers. This evergreen, with fragrant flowers, is a native of the central Andes where it grows in temperate rain forests. The flowers are important for honey production and locally the plant is used medicinally. The flowers are followed by fleshy fruits containing seeds which germinate freely around the mature trees. The leaves are fragrant when crushed. A particular feature of the plant is the delightful cinnamon coloured bark which exfoliates to reveal creamy patches. Luma is an old Marpuche Indian word referring to the orange colour of the bark.

Also here, are two trees of the Chilean Lantern Tree, *Crinodendron patagua* (**Right Below**), best viewed from the path leading from the **Australian Garden (4)** down to the Americas collection. This is another tree from the temperate rain forests of Chile which has a number of uses. The fringed white hanging lantern-like flowers are important for honey production and the wood is used in furniture making. The bark contains tannins and is used for tanning leather.



**Left:** Chilean Myrtle, *Luma apiculata*

**Right:** Chilean Lantern Tree, *Crinodendron patagua*

In the **Palm Garden (7)**, look for the Red Bolivian Fuchsia, *Fuchsia boliviana* (**Left Below**). 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.



Growing on the walls of the steps leading to the **Edulis Restaurant (10)** you will see two showy climbers. The evergreen highly scented white-flowered plant is Star Jasmine, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* (**Right Below**), a native of eastern and south-eastern Asia. Growing with it, the very showy passion flower 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.



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



**Right:** Passion Flower 'Lavender Lady'

Follow the path alongside the showy **Walled Garden & Long Border (13)** where a huge range of shrubby, mostly Mexican, Salvias are now coming into bloom. Mexico is home to the widest diversity of wild sages (*Salvia*) in the world due to its wide range of habitats from deserts to mountainous cloud forests. Those grown in this country show a wide diversity of flower colour and a long flowering season, extending through the autumn until Christmas time. Many of them are half hardy in this country.



**Left:** Anise-scented Sage, *Salvia guaranitica*



**Right:** Rosy-leaf Sage, *Salvia involucrata*

Also along this border, look for the strange deep blue hooded flowers of *Strobilanthes attenuate* (**Left Below**), growing on rounded bushes with dark green hairy leaves. This is a plant from northern India and Nepal with a long flowering period.

At the entrance to the **Walled Garden & Long Border (13)**, you will notice a small tree covered with bunches of fragrant white petalled flowers, the Harlequin Glorybower, *Clerodendron trichotomum* (**Right Below**). The leaves have an unpleasant smell when crushed. This plant is principally grown for its colourful fruits which start of white and then turn a remarkable turquoise colour, unlike any other plant. The pigment which gives rise to this striking colour is called trichotomine.





**Left:** *Strobilanthes attenuata*

**Right:** Harlequin Glorybower, *Clerodendron trichotomum*

From in front of the **VBG Studio (21)**, walk across to the flowerbed situated below the carpark wall, behind the seat. Here, growing against the wall, you will find the tender Giant Burmese Honeysuckle, *Lonicera hildebrandiana* (**Left Below**). This plant has the largest flowers of any honeysuckle in the world. In the wild, the night scented flowers are pollinated by hawk moths with particularly long tongues to reach the nectar at the base of the 15 cm long flower tubes. You can examine these more closely from the car park above because the plant is growing over the wall here. They are white when first opened and then turn yellow when pollinated, although in this country there are few moths with a long enough proboscis to effect pollination.

A final plant to look out for before you leave is growing beneath the low stone wall on the north side of **Top Lawn**. It is the South African Bird of Paradise Flower, *Strelitzia reginae* (**Right Below**), a further testament to the very special micro-climate at Ventnor Botanic Garden allowing us to grow so many unusual and tender plants which you would be hard pushed to find growing outside elsewhere in this country.



**Left:** Giant Burmese Honeysuckle, *Lonicera hildenbrandiana*

**Right:** Bird of Paradise Flower, *Strelitzia reginae*

This is just a taste of some of interesting plants growing the Garden. We hope you have enjoyed looking at some of the special plants which make the Botanic Garden unique.

There is always something new to see here throughout the year and every visit will bring new botanical surprises.



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