

## SPECIAL PLANTS OF THE MONTH

April 2023

Apart from any currently flowering plants in the list below, other species along the way which may still be in flower in April include the tall *Yucca elephantipes* near the Goodman building and a *Yucca* sp. with spikes of large white flowers on the main path between sites 8 and 9. Near both specimens of monkey's earrings (#10) are long white racemes of the ivory curl flower from the family Proteaceae.



See over page for map

\*An Australian native

- 1 ***Sorbus 'Joseph Rock'*** Yellow-berried mountain ash, rowan Cultivar  
Mountain ashes are small, deciduous trees with pinnate leaves from the rose family. 'Joseph Rock', first raised from seed collected in Yunnan in the 1930s, produces clusters of yellow berries which will contrast with its scarlet autumn leaves. The bitter, red 'berries' of the European mountain ash (*Sorbus aucuparia*) were used in folk medicine, and to make jellies and teas rich in vitamin C. The early Celts believed it had magical properties and tied a sprig of rowan to a cow's tail in the belief that it would deter malevolent fairies from stealing her milk. The 'berries' of mountain ash are actually pomes, like apple, pear and quince.
- 2 ***Thymus herba-barona*** Caraway thyme Corsica, Sardinia, Majorca  
Caraway thyme is grown as an ornamental creeping ground cover and as a culinary herb used to flavour potato salads, other vegetables and meats (eg barons of beef in England). It is also used in traditional medicines and in perfumes. These young plants are not well-established so please keep to the path.
- 3 ***Chaenomeles cathayensis*** Cathay quince, flowering Chinese quince East Asia, China, Tibet  
Cathay quince is a deciduous shrub or small tree with clusters of pink-tinged white flowers in spring. The large yellow-green fruit, unpalatable when raw, are fragrant when cooked and can be added to apple pies or used for jams and jellies. Plant parts are harvested from the wild for food and traded for medicinal use.
- 4 ***Capparis spinosa*** Caper bush Mediterranean basin, Arabian Pen. parts of W and central Asia  
Caper bush is a hardy species from semiarid or arid environments in its native range. It tolerates poor soils and can be easily propagated from seeds, ripe fruit, or stem cuttings. The flowers are particularly attractive, but it is the young flower buds and immature fruit that are pickled and sold as capers and caper berries.
- 5 ***Gossypium barbadense*** Egyptian, sea island, or pima cotton, Ecuador, Peru  
To the left of the caper bush is sea island cotton, one of several species of commercial cotton. Originally from SW Ecuador and NW Peru, evidence of its domestication dates to 4400 BCE. Now cultivated around the world in tropical climes, it is prized for the particularly long silky fibres attached to the seeds which are contained in a capsule known as a boll. *G. barbadense* accounts for 5% of world cotton production.
- 6 ***Uncarina grandidieri*** Succulent sesame, mousetrap tree Madagascar  
In the NE corner of the Palm House, this stout, stem-succulent from the southern dry forests has soft, hairy, mildly-sticky leaves which release a musty odour when touched. The broad yellow lobes of the petals form a landing pad for pollen-eating beetles looking for the anthers inside the long floral tube. The unusual, paste-like pollen is transferred to the stigmas of other flowers on the head and body of these messy feeders. Like many of the Madagascan species in the Palm House, *Uncarina grandidieri* is threatened by habitat loss
- 7 ***Cycas revoluta*** Sago palm, Japanese sago palm S Japan & Ryukyu Islands  
This slow-growing cycad is a single- or multi-trunked gymnosperm with terminal rosette-like whorls of stiff pinnate leaves on each branch. The crowded leaflets are narrow with revolute margins. The males produce typical, usually cylindrical, woody pollen cones, but the female plants of this species have seeds borne in a large spherical cluster of leathery, leafy structures. It is widely grown as an ornamental and for cycad sago, an edible starch, mainly from the trunk, which needs extensive processing to remove dangerous toxins.
- \*8 ***Wollemia nobilis*** Wollemi pine NSW  
Standing alone on the lawn is a young Wollemi pine which was planted here in the year 2000, 6 years after what was described as the botanical find of the century. The Wollemi pine was assumed to be extinct until a small relict grove was discovered in NSW in 1994. This specimen has many young globular seed cones and a few finger-like pollen cones at the branch tips. The cultivation and commercial release of Wollemi pines to the public is a key component of the strategy for conservation of this endangered species.
- 9 ***Tetraclinis articulata*** Alerce, arar tree, sandarac NW Africa, Malta, SE Spain  
The only species in its genus, alerce is a conifer from the family Cupressaceae, found in hot dry areas across its native range. It is pyramidal when young, spreading with age, but can also be multi-stemmed. Earliest recorded use of its fragrant reddish-brown wood, burls and small translucent gold chips of sandarac resin is from ancient Greek temples. Today, due to the scarcity of timber, the burls are highly prized for cabinetry, furniture and small wooden trinkets. Dried sandarac is used as incense and in painter's varnish.
- \*10 ***Pararchidendron pruinosum*** Monkeys earrings, snow wood Indonesia, PNG, NSW to N. Qld  
In Australia this small tree grows in tropical, sub-tropical and warm temperate rainforests along the coast and ranges. Its close relationship to the acacias can be seen in the similarity of the flowerheads, in this case balls of tiny, greenish-white flowers and the fruits which, like acacia, are pods (legumes) which split at maturity. The flattened legume forms a shallow spiral which twists on splitting to reveal a red interior with hard, shiny black seeds. Initially green, the legumes turn yellow and then an orange-brown when ripe.