

SPECIAL PLANTS OF THE MONTH December 2022–January 2023

This month's list begins near a water feature much-loved by children floating leaves along the central rill of the Mediterranean Garden, and ends near another where you might find white-faced heron wading amongst the waterlilies (*Nymphaea* spp.) in the middle of the Sunken Garden.



See over page for map

*An Australian native

- 1 SA Water Mediterranean Garden** Mediterranean basin, California, Chile, South Africa, WA
Established in 2006 during a time of water restrictions in Adelaide, the focus in this central area is on plants with low water demands from here and other areas around the world with a mediterranean climate. Work on rejuvenation is now in progress, with new plantings, paving and landscape features that might inspire choices for your own garden in a changing climate. In the meantime, two existing features are the cloud pruning of *Helichrysum petiolare* from South Africa (**1a**) and the stunning blue flowers and orange anthers of *Puya alpestris* from Chile (**1b**).
- 2 *Cotinus coggygria* 'Velvet Cloak'** European smokebush Cultivar
Another existing feature, on either side of the central rill, is the rich plum-coloured foliage of smokebush, a shrub from the mango-cashew family. After flowering, most flowers elongate into wispy plumes, giving the impression of a smoky haze around the few which do develop fruit. Heavy pruning may reduce flowering, but with or without the plumes, smokebush can be an eye-catching feature of any well-drained garden.
- *3 *Cyathea cooperi*** Lacy tree fern NSW, QLD
From the bridge leading into the Australian Forest look for the tall, slender, tree fern in the patch of vegetation on your right. The plantings here are multi-layered, with eucalypts overtopping Davidson's plums and other, stockier tree ferns. The understorey includes a *Lomandra* with strappy leaves and small yellow flowers, and the sprawling, lavender-flowered *Cordyline*. This patch mimics to some extent the structure, if not the species mix, you might find in a natural community.
- *4 *Cordyline* sp. (unlabelled)** Cordyline, palm lilies SE Asia, NSW, QLD, NZ, W. Pacific, S America
The tall, erect cordyline beside the path, with long, strappy leaves and drooping panicles of delicate mauve flowers fits the description of *C. stricta* (narrow-leaved palm lily) native to rainforests and open forests of north-east NSW and SE Queensland. Surprisingly tolerant of drier conditions once established, it is also suitable for bush gardens, architectural gardens or, when young, as an elegant container plant for indoors. Cordylines in general are easily-propagated, and popular with weavers for their strong fibres.
- 5 Cascade Fountain** Artist: Sergio Redegalli -1988
This striking, beautiful sculpture was installed in 1989 to complement the Bicentennial Conservatory nearby. Originally commissioned for the Brisbane World Expo in 1988, it was donated to the Gardens by Pilkington Glass (Australia) with help from the Engineering and Water Supply Department (now SA Water). It is made from 500 pieces of 6mm-thick float glass (molten glass floated on molten tin) held together by silicone.
- 6 *Arbutus* spp.** Strawberry trees, madrones See text
The two species of *Arbutus* in this stand are favourites with many visitors for their smooth reddish-orange bark and, at this time of year for the attractive new pale-green bark forming beneath. *A. canariensis*, is endemic to the Canary Islands, growing in cloud forests dominated by laurels, whereas *A. glandulosa* (now *A. xalapensis*) grows in canyons, rocky plains and oak woodlands of southwest USA and Mexico.
- 7 *Cercis siliquastrum*** Judas tree Southern Europe and Western Asia
This small deciduous tree is noted for its prolific display of deep-pink flowers on bare branches in spring, followed by a shady canopy of heart-shaped leaves. Legend has it that Judas Iscariot hanged himself on such a tree, but the common name is more likely a corruption of the French 'Arbre de Judée', referring to the hills of Judea where it was once common. In the Middle-East it is used as an antiseptic, as a digestive tea and to treat infectious diseases. Across the path is a young specimen laden with dangling red legumes.
- 8 *Cupressus macrocarpa* 'Berrigold'** Monterey cypress Cultivar
Beyond the young *Cercis* is a large Monterey cypress with golden-yellow foliage. This cultivar originated as a seedling grown at the Department of Agriculture, Berri, SA, in the 1930s. The scale like, opposite leaves, have a lemony smell when rubbed. The strong, durable timber is used for structural work, cabinetmaking and musical instruments. Columnar when young, they generally age to a more spreading, horizontal form.
- *9 The Seed Orchard** (under the bird-netting)
The seed orchard, an important part of the work of the South Australian Seed Conservation Centre, has only recently been opened to the public. Informative signage explains the role of the orchard in the Centre's vital contribution to the conservation of threatened plant species in this state.
- 10 *Strelitzia reginae* var. *junceae*** Bird of paradise or crane flower South Africa
Named for the wife of George III, Queen Charlotte from the house of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, this popular evergreen perennial at the bottom of the steps down to the Sunken Garden has an inflorescence likened to the head and beak of an exotic bird. The flowers, each with 3 orange sepals and 3 blue petals, emerge from a hard, beak-like spathe. Two of the petals above the nectary are fused, forming a reinforced arrow-like sheath cupping the stamens. The weight of a bird probing the nectary, best-accessed from this convenient perch, exposes the anthers which cover its feet in pollen before it heads off to another flower.