

SPECIAL PLANTS OF THE MONTH

September 2023



This month's walk begins in the Mediterranean Garden which features plants from the Mediterranean Basin and areas with similar climates around the world, such as the chaparral of California, the matorral of Chile, the fynbos of South Africa and the kwongan of southwest WA. There are still some of the colour-coded labels for these regions remaining after the recent rejuvenation of the garden

See over page for map

*An Australian native

- 1 *Echium candicans*** Pride of Madeira Madeira (Portuguese autonomous region)
E. candicans is an herbaceous shrubby perennial endemic to the island of Madeira off the coast of Morocco in the North Atlantic. The long spikes of blue flowers are a copious source of nectar for butterflies and bees, and the species is now widely grown as an ornamental in both traditional and drought-tolerant gardens designed to conserve water. It is, however, considered invasive in California, especially in coastal parks.
- 2 *Chamaerops humilis*** European fan palm Coastal rim of the western Mediterranean Sea
The northernmost naturally-occurring palm, this cold-tolerant ornamental has one or more fibrous, spiny trunks with many fan-shaped fronds. When in flower, panicles of small bright-yellow flowers are borne in the lower leaf axils, followed by small, date-like fruits with a high tannin content and an astringent taste. The fibres in the leaves are used to make household items such as brooms, baskets, hats and cordage.
- *3 *Potamogeton crispus*** Curly pond weed Australia, Asia, Europe
In the water north of the bridge over the storage pond this submerged aquatic perennial is in flower. Its tiny flowers, photographed under a microscope, are shown in the accompanying signage.
- *4 Seed Orchard** South Australian Seed Conservation Centre
The Seed Orchard is an important part of efforts to preserve and propagate some of the most endangered species of the state including the yellow-flowering *Hibbertia tenuis*, (NE corner of the orchard) found around peat bog swamps south of Adelaide, but critically endangered due to threats from drainage, land clearance, weeds and livestock grazing. As well as providing seed for long-term storage, seed grown here can be used to add to its natural populations without continued harvesting of seed from the wild.
- 5 *Ceanothus griseus* 'Yankee Point'** Cultivar
The blue-flowered *Ceanothus griseus* 'Yankee Point' near Andy Goldsworthy's 1992 slate installation 'Black Spring', is one of a number of *Ceanothus* species and cultivars in the beds overlooking the Sunken Garden. These nitrogen-fixing species have their centre of distribution in the Californian chaparral, a drought-tolerant vegetation shaped by a Mediterranean climate (mild, wet winters, hot dry summers) and wildfire.
- *6 *Eremophila* garden**
On either side of the path here are two species of *Eremophila* with different flower-shapes. The blue flowers of *E. cuneifolia* with the three lower lobes of the corolla forming a broad landing platform are most likely pollinated by insects. More brightly-coloured, often red, flowers like the *E. maculata* opposite, attract nectar-feeding birds which are dusted with pollen by stamens protruding from long, drooping corolla tubes with just one narrow recurved lower lobe. The receptive female stigma also protrudes beyond the petals.
- *7 *Acacia glaucoptera*** Flat wattle, clay wattle. Endemic to the south-west corner of WA
Despite the profusion of yellow flowerheads, this unusual wattle is grown mainly for its foliage and, in particular the attractive red tinge of its new growth. The clipped hedges flanking this rather unruly acacia are *Callistemon salignus* 'Great Balls of Fire', a cultivar bred in Australia for its fiery-red new growth.
- *8 *Eucalyptus youngiana*** Ooldea mallee, large-fruited mallee Great Victoria Desert (SA and WA)
Ooldea mallee is one of the most attractive ornamental eucalypts. The fruit (gumnuts) said to be the heaviest of any eucalypt species, are large and conspicuously ribbed. The cream, pink, red, or yellow eucalypt flowers are in groups of three and appear from late winter through to early summer.
- *9 *Senna artemisioides*** Silver cassia Arid regions of all mainland states
At this time of year, the dominant colour in the mallee beds is the yellow of flowering acacias and sennas, from the family Leguminosae (syn. Fabaceae). The familiar pompoms of acacia flowerheads are dominated by the golden-yellow anthers of their many tiny flowers, but all parts of the buttercup-like flowers of *Senna artemisioides* can be clearly seen, even the green, bean-shaped ovary which will eventually ripen into a legume, the typical fruit of this family, splitting down both sides at maturity.
- *10 *Dodonaea subglandulifera*** Peep Hill hop-bush South Australia
The flowers of this dioecious species are inconspicuous amongst the small, dark-green pinnate leaves, but the two female plants on this path regularly produce a display of attractive seed capsules in late winter. The 3- to 4-winged papery fruits progress from greenish-yellow to deep maroon and mature between August and December. The pollinators are not known. Although probably an early coloniser after soil disturbance or fire, it is still listed as endangered because its small, scattered populations are not well-protected.
- *11 *Hakea francisiana*** Bottlebrush or grass-leaved hakea WA, SA
Hakea francisiana was formally described in 1858 by Ferdinand von Mueller, director of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens (1857 to 1873). He named the species in honour of George Francis, our first director, who collected the type specimen. Both the grey-green foliage and long racemes of pinkish-red flowers of this hardy, upright shrub are prized in floral arrangements. The woody fruits contain two winged seeds.