

## SPECIAL PLANTS OF THE MONTH

October 2022



This month's walk begins in the Mediterranean Garden, between the two wisteria arbours, leads through the Australian Forest to the Classground, then past a bust of Linnaeus, who first described the brown kurrajong (#4) and trained Daniel Solander (#9). The walk ends in the Economic Garden after a short excursion into Botanic Park.

See over page for map

\*An Australian native

- 1 ***Cistus* spp.** Rock roses Mediterranean Basin, Canary Islands  
The genus *Cistus* includes some 20 species of evergreen shrubs and a similar number of hybrids. Two species, one perhaps related to *Cistus x purpureus* 'Brilliancy', the taller of the rockroses here, are the source of ladanum, a resin used as an ingredient in perfumes and vermouth. This old hybrid with purple blotches at the base of deep-pink petals is a cross between *C. ladanifer* and *C. creticus*. The smaller shrub with pale-pink petals is probably *Cistus x skanbergii*, the dwarf pink rock rose. The ability to thrive on poor, rocky soils is likely due to their association with a wide range of mycorrhizal fungi. Neither are true roses.
- 2 ***Tagetes lemmonii*** Lemmon's daisy, Mexican marigold Southern Arizona, NW Mexico  
Named for 19th century field botanists, John and Sara Lemmon, this aromatic, long-flowering perennial is native to moist canyon grasslands and woodlands in the upper Sonoran zone of basin and range deserts of southwest USA and northern Mexico. Its bright, golden daisy-like flowerheads attract butterflies and bees and it is now grown, along with many hybrids, in gardens world-wide. The leaves have a distinctive pungent aroma, likened to a mixture of marigold, lemon and mint, which some people enjoy and others dislike.
- \*3 ***Brachychiton rupestris*** Narrow-leaved or Queensland bottle tree Central Qld to northern NSW  
Easily recognised by its distinctive bottle-shaped trunk, this tall tree has small creamy-yellow clusters of bell-shaped flowers, often hidden amongst the foliage, from late spring to early summer. The flowers eventually produce the familiar boat-shaped fruits characteristic of the kurrajongs. Indigenous peoples ate the seeds, obtained drinking water from the water-rich fibres of the inner bark, and made ropes from the fibres.
- \*4 ***Commersonia bartramia*** Brown kurrajong Qld, NSW, NT, SE Asia  
Common in rainforests of coastal northern Australia, brown kurrajong has panicles of small stellate flowers high in the canopy throughout summer, providing nectar for butterflies. Local peoples of coastal Australia are known to have eaten its glossy, brown seeds and used the fibrous bark to make ropes. Kurrajong, a name applied to several Australian tree species with fibrous bark useful for rope making, is thought to be an interpretation of the word "garajun", meaning fishing line in the language of the Dharug people
- \*5 ***Ficus coronata*** Sandpaper fig Mainly coastal Qld and NSW  
Feel the leaves of this unusual fig, once popularly believed to have been used to polish wooden implements and shells. The specific epithet 'coronata' refers to the crown of red bristles at the apex of the fig.
- 6 ***Bartlettia sordida*** Blue mist flower Mexico, Guatemala  
The large-leaved shrubs with reddish-purple branches at the entrance to the Classground are native to the understorey of high altitude cloud forests in Central America. The large, terminal clusters of flowerheads in shades of lilac to blue are said to look rather like exploding fireworks. The flowers also have a fragrance reminiscent of lilacs, and are very attractive to butterflies. Its fruits, attached to a fluffy pappus common in the daisy family, are widely dispersed by wind, and hence it has the potential to become an invasive weed.
- 7 ***Fatsia japonica*** Japanese fatsia, paper plant Japan, South Korea  
Derived from an early Japanese word meaning eight fingers, *Fatsia* refers to the 'eight' (7 to 9) lobes on its large, long-stemmed leaves. The clusters of fleshy black fruits above the canopy have developed from ball-shaped umbels of small, 5-petaled, white flowers in late autumn. When grown indoors fatsia has been shown to remove the harmful gases, such as formaldehyde, emitted from particle boards, carpets and other sources, responsible for 'sick building syndrome' in modern, poorly-ventilated office blocks.
- 8 ***Ficus thonningii*** Strangler fig, mugumo Tropical Africa  
If you step outside the Friend's Gate, the large fig with the curtain of aerial roots to the ENE, is just one of the many trees you may see on a free guided-tour of Botanic Park (Mondays at 2pm). In its natural range it is often planted for shade, fencing, food, livestock fodder and for its medicinal values.
- 9 ***Solandra maxima*** Golden chalice vine Mexico to Colombia  
This spectacular, woody vine climbing through the canopy of a Moreton Bay fig produces large, fragrant cup-shaped flowers in spring and summer. The fragrance has hints of vanilla and coconut. One of the toxic members of the family Solanaceae, it contains atropine, so if you handle any fallen flowers take care not to touch your eyes. The genus is named for Daniel Solander, a Swedish botanist and student of Linnaeus, who sailed with James Cook and Joseph Banks on the 1768 voyage of the *Endeavour*.
- \*10 ***Pouteria australis*** Black apple, black plum, wild plum Coastal NSW, Qld  
Amongst the glossy green leaves of this small tree from the family Sapotaceae are large 'plum-like' fruits which will ripen to a glossy purple-black. The flesh is high in vitamin C and antioxidants, and can be eaten fresh, cooked, or made into vinegar or cider. The taste has been variously described as bland, tart or sweet. The hard wood with an attractive yellow pattern was favoured by early colonists for building, and is popular today with wood carvers. Some visitors may even have had a school ruler made from black apple wood.