

SPECIAL PLANTS OF THE MONTH

February 2023

On a hot day in February the Goodman Plaza (mistletoe) and the Amazon Waterlily Pavilion (#4 and #5) may test your resolve, but there are several shady stations along the walk for some respite. In the Economic Garden (chaste tree and teasel) you may be lucky enough to see rainbow lorikeets showering in water from the topmost spout of the Boy and Serpent fountain.



See over page for map

*An Australian native

- *1 *Amyema preissii*** Wire-leaf mistletoe Widespread in mainland Australia
Growing on the slender, red-stemmed *Acacia araneosa* from the Flinders Ranges is a clump of wire-leaf mistletoe, a hemi-parasitic shrub which gets its water and minerals from the host, but makes its own sugars. A long-flowering species, (December to May in SA), it will develop pink or white berries which are dispersed by mistletoe birds and singing honey-eaters among others. Mainly found on acacias, it is a preferred food of camels in the drier areas. It is named for a German botanist, Johann Preiss, a botanical collector in WA.
- 2 *Pistacia vera* 'Sirora'** Pistachio Cultivar
Pistacia vera is unusual amongst orchard trees being dioecious (separate male and female trees) and wind pollinated. After pollination in spring, the females produce clusters of egg-shaped drupes, each with a seed (the culinary 'nut') enclosed in a white bony shell which (atypically) splits when ripe. 'Sirora', along the south wall of the Herbarium, is an Australian commercial cultivar, developed in 1990, with a lower chilling requirement for fruit production than other varieties, producing slightly smaller but still attractive tasty nuts.
- 3 *Cedrus deodara*** Himalayan cedar, deodar Afghanistan to Nepal
In contrast to the pistachio, this magnificent, spreading Himalayan cedar with downswept branches and branchlets with characteristically drooping tips has separate male and female cones on the same tree (monoecious). Finger-like pollen cones low down and barrel-shaped seed cones high in the canopy are more or less erect in this genus. The tips of the two ovules on each scale of the female cones secrete droplets which capture wind-blown pollen. If compatible, pollen grains germinate delivering sperm to the eggs in slow-growing pollen tubes after a journey of many months, ultimately resulting in two winged seeds.
- 4 *Coffea arabica*** Arabica coffee South Sudan, Kenya, and (mainly) southern Ethiopia
In the NW corner of the central (pond) area of the pavilion, *C. arabica* with glossy green leaves has small, fragrant, white flowers growing from the branches. The fruit ('coffee cherry') when it develops is a drupe containing two seeds known as 'coffee beans'. Initially green, fruits ripen to bright red before harvest when the beans are removed from the pulp, fermented to break down the outer covering, then dehulled, dried and roasted. A natural hybrid of two southern Ethiopian species, *C. arabica* was first cultivated in Yemen, but Brazil is now the largest producer. In the SE corner is another cultivar – *Coffea arabica* 'Rojo Dwarf'.
- 5 *Heliconia rostrata*** Parrot's beak, lobster claw, heliconia Tropical Americas
On the southern side of the lily pond, the long, hanging inflorescence of heliconia, very popular as a feature in tropical settings, consists of opposite rows of bright-red bracts tipped with yellow or green. In its native range, the pale-yellow flowers inside are pollinated by hummingbirds feeding on the copious nectar.
- *6 *Ficus macrophylla*** Moreton Bay fig East coast Australia, Hervey Bay to Illawarra
A wonderful place to linger on a hot day, this avenue of Moreton Bay figs is one of our botanical gems. Planted in 1866, just a year after the arrival of our 2nd Director, Richard Schomburgk, they were originally flanked by cages of exotic animals until the zoo was relocated in 1882. Remarkably, although one of the largest species of *Ficus* with massive buttress roots, Moreton Bay fig makes an excellent Bonsai specimen.
- 7 *Vitex agnus-castus*** Chaste tree Southern Europe
Its name partly taken from the Latin *veio*, to weave, this species of *Vitex* was commonly used in basketry. The Greek and Latin words for chaste in the species name, reflect the belief that the leaves and berries once used by Greek women in chastity rituals acted as an *anaphrodisiac*. Extracts now sold as treatments for female reproductive issues, should be treated with caution as side effects are common and can be severe. The delicate, scented flowers, however, will attract many butterflies and bees to your garden.
- 8 *Dipsacus sativus*** Teasel Europe, Asia and northern Africa
The prickly seed-heads of teasel were widely-used in early textile processing. They provided a natural comb for cleaning, aligning and raising the nap on fabrics, particularly wool, but by the 20th century, teasels had been largely replaced by more uniform, longer-lasting metal cards. However, if caught in a knot, the more fragile teasel will break before tearing the cloth, so is still used on the most expensive, high-end fabrics.
- 9 *Ulmus procera* 'Louis van Houtte'** Golden Elm Cultivar
To the left of the footbridge leading into the Palm Garden, this impressive golden elm has a dense, spreading canopy of serrated yellow-green leaves which turn golden yellow during autumn. It is usually an excellent shade tree, though in some years elm-leaf beetles can cause a lot of leaf damage. Clusters of small red flowers are produced from axillary buds, normally appearing before the leaves during spring. The cultivar was named for the Belgian horticulturist and plant collector Louis Benoit van Houtte (1810-1876).
- 10 *Quercus macrocarpa*** Burr oak Eastern North America
In summer, the majestic oak overhanging the tables at the Simpson kiosk has a very welcome shady canopy of glossy, dark-green leaves. The acorns, the largest of any North American oak, are examples of a true botanical nut – a dry, hard-shelled, single-seeded fruit which does not split at maturity.