



# Botanical highlights in December the Garden

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THE NUMBERS REFER TO THE GARDENS AS SHOWN ON YOUR MAP.

Evenings may be drawing in, but it is still worth a visit to the Garden to see what's still in flower. Here are some of the specialities which you may enjoy searching for.

As soon as you enter the **Herb & Medicinal Garden (2)**, you will notice lavenders flowering on the left hand bank. These are the **Fringed Lavender, *Lavandula dentata***. If you examine the leaves, you will see that they have toothed edges quite unlike the common lavender we grow in our gardens at home. This species can be found in the wild on Madeira and the Canary isles. Elsewhere in the Medicinal Garden, the very intensely coloured lavender bushes in flower are ***Lavandula buchii* var *buchii***, a lavender which is endemic to the island of Tenerife on the Canaries. You will notice that these silvery leaves are deeply cut, almost fern-like. Both of the above plants are quite tender and unable to withstand more than the lightest touch of frost. Look also for the **Mexican Sage, *Salvia longistyla***, with spikes of fiery red flowers. The long tubular flowers are bird pollinated and the leaves, when crushed, have a smell of pineapple.



**Left:** *Lavandula dentata*

**Right:** *Lavandula buchii* var. *buchii*

On the **South African Terrace (3)**, look out for the late-flowering **Giant Poker, *Kniphofia multiflora***. Although this is a Red hot Poker, it looks very different with a tall thin flowering stem bristling with small, upward facing yellow flowers. It comes from wet mountainous areas of South Africa, where it is rare. It is on the borderline of hardiness in this country.

You will also see bushes covered with yellow daisy-flowers. This is the **Grey-leaved Euryops, *Euryops pectinatus*** from the Western Cape. A number of different *Euryops* species are grown on the South African Terrace. The name Euryops is derived from the Greek meaning *eury*s, meaning large and *ops* meaning eye, referring to the showy flowers.





**Left:** Giant Poker, *Kniphofia multiflora*

**Right:** Grey-leaved Euryops, *Euryops pectinatus*

As you enter the **Australian Garden (4)**, you will see that there is a bush of a cultivar of ***Grevillea juniperina*** flowering on your right hand side. Grevilleas bear clusters of strange petal-less flowers. The colour is due to the petal-like tepals which are united in a calyx tube from which emerges a long red style. The pouch at the base of each flower contains nectar. Grevillea was named after Charles Greville, Vice President of the Royal Horticultural Society in the late eighteenth century and close friend of Sir Joseph Banks.

Elsewhere in the Australian Garden, there is an interesting tree close to position C on your map and just before reaching Bob's Bridge. It is on the right hand side of the path and you will see the label ***Banksia integrifolia* ssp. *Monticola*** and notice the clusters of old flowerheads on the old stems. Banksias were named in honour of Sir Joseph Banks who collected specimens in 1770 during James Cook's first expedition to Australia. They have dense, tightly packed flower spikes rich in nectar and an important food source for pollinating birds. The flowers on this specimen are quite high up but you can see them if you walk towards Bob's Bridge and look back. This subspecies is very rare in the wild and this specimen is the only one growing outside in this country.



**Left:** *Grevillea juniperina*

**Right:** *Banksia integrifolia* ssp. *monticola*

From the **Palm Garden (7)** look up to the Plantation Café and on the planted terraces below the Café you will see a bush covered in purple flowers. (You can follow a path to get closer to this plant). This is the South African **Ribbon Bush, *Hypoestes aristata*** and it will flower throughout the winter if the weather is kind. As well as being showy and providing an important nectar source for insects, it is eaten as spinach in some parts of South Africa while traditionally, crushed leaves are used as a poultice for sore eyes. You can also see *Hypoestes aristata* at the top of the South African Terraces from the carpark when you leave.



In one of the beds in the Palm Garden, you will see a clump of ***Nerine undulata*** in flower. It is a native of open grasslands and wetlands in the Eastern Cape Province. Hardy Nerines are often grown in gardens. This, more tender species, is later flowering and has more dainty pink flowers.



**Left:** Ribbon Bush, *Hypoestes aristata*

**Right:** *Nerine undulata*

As you walk down the Long Border towards the Walled Garden notice the many varieties of *Salvia* which continue to put on a colourful show. In the shelter of the **Walled Garden (13)**, there is a large *Buddleja* bush with strongly fragrant creamy flowers, attractive to pollinating insects, on weeping branches. This is **Weeping Sage** or ***Buddleja auriculata***, a half hardy species from South Africa. It has been growing here for many years, being one of the original introductions by Hillier in the 1980s. It is said to have the finest scent of all the *Buddlejas*. Growing nearby you can see the **Willow-leaved Jessamine**, ***Cestrum parqui***. The usual form of this Chilean shrub bears clusters of lime green night-scented tubular flowers. Elsewhere in the Walled Garden you can find a purple flowered hybrid referred to as Cretan Purple. All parts of these plants are poisonous.



**Left:** Weeping Sage, *Buddleja auriculata*

**Right:** *Cestrum parqui*

Along the top terrace of the **Mediterranean Garden (10)** is a remarkable plant well worth a detour to see. You can find it close to the foot of the steps leading up to VGB Studio. It is a spiky bush bearing heads of terracotta flowers. This is ***Acanthus senii***, a relative of Bear's Breech, *Acanthus mollis*, commonly grown in gardens for its foliage and flowers. It hails from Ethiopia where it is sometimes planted as a low hedge to keep livestock away from small plots where vegetables are grown. The striking flowers, with a large flag-like lip are well worth seeing.

In the flowerbeds in front of the **Tropical House (18)**, is another unusual scented flowering bush. Look for a tall willowy bush bearing dropping clusters of whitish flowers turning yellow on the insides. This is the **Honeybell Bush**,



***Freylinia lanceolata***, so called because the sweetly honey-scented flowers are a good source of nectar. In the wild, it is found in moist areas such as along streams or the edges of marshes in South Africa. Its name derives from when it was first cultivated in Europe, in the garden of Count Freylinio outside of Turin in Italy in 1817, where it caused quite a stir. This plant used to be an irregular flowerer with us but in the past two winters it has flowered prolifically, attracting late butterflies on still, sunny days.



**Left:** *acanthus senii*

**Right:** Honeybells, *Freylinia lanceolata*

As you make your way out across the Top Lawn, you will notice several flowering bushes of *Correa*, evergreen bushes with hanging, bell-shaped flowers in cream or pink. Our bush of ***Correa backhousiana*** is covered with abundant creamy flowers. There are around 11 different species and they are all native to eastern Australia. The largest of these is the **Grampian Mountains *Correa* *Correa lawrenceana*** which has drooping pink flowers with long green stamens extending out beyond the petals. You can see this one just at the edge of the Top Lawn. This species was first described by William Jackson Hooker, in 1834. He was Director of Kew Gardens and friends with the botanist explorer Sir Joseph Banks. The specific name *lawrenceana* was given in honour of the Tasmanian botanist Robert William Lawrence who collected the plant material and sent it to Hooker.



**Left:** *Correa backhousiana*

**Right:** *Correa lawrenceana*

**We hope you have enjoyed looking at some of the special plants which make Ventnor Botanic Garden unique.**

**There is always something new to see here throughout the year and every visit will bring new botanical surprises.**