

## SPECIAL PLANTS OF THE MONTH December 2021–January 2022

December visitors may be in time to see the sausage tree west of the Summerhouse in full flower, and need only listen for the cacophony of slightly tipsy lorikeets to find the *Schotia brachypetala*, dripping with nectar, south of the lotus pond. The flame tree in the dahlia garden is also promising a spectacular display, and later in the summer the ever-popular sacred lotus should be in flower.



See over page for map

\*An Australian native

- 1 ***Salvia leucophylla*** Grey or purple sage Coastal ranges of California and Baja California  
A graceful growth habit and tight whorls of attractive purple flowers along the stem make this salvia a popular landscaping plant. Reflection of light from the pale-grey leaves keeps the leaves cooler, allowing the plant to thrive in the hot, dry, conditions of its native habitat. Competition for scarce water and nutrients may also be reduced by allelopathic compounds in litter which inhibit the growth of nearby plants.
- \*2 ***Anigozanthos 'Orange Cross'*** Kangaroo paw Cultivar  
Thought to be a naturally occurring hybrid of *A. preisii* and *A. flavidus*, Orange Cross is typical of the taller kangaroo paws. The genus was described and named (from the Greek for 'unequal flowers') by the French biologist Labillardière, who collected material in 1792. There are 11 species in the genus, all endemic to southwest WA. Tolerant of many soil types and some humidity, it is a good choice for Adelaide gardens.
- 3 ***Salvia apiana*** Bee sage, white sage Coastal northern Mexico and southern California  
This pungent salvia with tall flowering stems near the wisteria arbour has pale foliage covered with fine hairs which trigger release of a resin from oil glands when rubbed. One of our guides describes the scent as a mixture of B.O. and onions! What do you think? Bees, however, find the plant irresistible (hence *apiana*).
- \*4 ***Brachychiton rupestris*** Queensland bottle tree Inland southern Qld  
Instantly recognisable from its common name, this specimen is taller than most of those in the rocky places (*rupestris*) vine thickets and brigalow scrub of its native range. It is classified as a stem-succulent for the water-rich tissues between the inner bark and trunk. A culturally significant plant, it was once used by local indigenous peoples as a source of water, food (eg seeds and roots) and fibre for ropes and nets.
- \*5 ***Ficus coronata*** Sandpaper fig Mackay (Qld) to Mallacoota (Vic)  
Found on river banks in rainforest and open forest along the east coast, this small tree has leaves with an upper surface as rough as sandpaper. Look for the small, edible figs, with a little crown of red bristles around the apex, growing along the young stems as well as the trunk and woody branches. It is said that Aboriginal peoples also used the leaves for polishing wood and turtle shells.
- 6 **The International Rose Garden and The National Rose Trial Garden (NRTG)**  
If you need to pamper your nose after your encounter with *Salvia apiana* (#3) you might like to try a little experiment. One study estimated that 70% of modern roses had little scent. You are invited to explore the rose gardens, especially the NRTG, for roses with a pronounced scent. How does your tally compare? Fortunately for enthusiasts, at least one highly-successful breeder of modern roses, David Austin from the UK, concentrated on breeding roses with 'old fashioned' qualities, especially perfume and flower form.
- 7 ***Pistacia vera 'Sirora'*** Pistachio Cultivar  
Wild pistachios in Iran or Afghanistan may grow as high as 10 m. This low-growing, easily-harvested cultivar of the commercial *Pistacia vera*, developed by the CSIRO for high yield, is well-suited to South Australian conditions. Young female trees here are producing for the first time. The fruit is a drupe, like apricot or cherry, but unlike most drupes, the pit or stone may split at maturity to reveal the tasty, protein-rich, green kernel or 'nut'. Two of the trees in the row are males, needed for pollination.
- 8 ***Arbutus spp.*** Strawberry trees, madrones Canary Islands and USA/Mexico  
The two species of *Arbutus* in this stand are from different parts of the world, but both have the striking reddish-orange bark and, in season, the 'strawberry-like' fruits characteristic of the genus. *A. canariensis*, is endemic to the Canary Islands, in cloud forests dominated by laurels, whereas *A. glandulosa* (now *A. xalapensis*) grows in canyons, mountains, rocky plains and oak woodlands of southwest USA and Mexico.
- 9 ***Magnolia grandiflora*** Bull bay magnolia Southeast USA  
In front of the Museum of Economic Botany is a pair of evergreen magnolias. They have large, glossy, dark-green leaves, rusty-coloured and tomentose below, and are well-known for the large, fragrant, white flowers that appear in the warmer months. The flowers are followed in autumn by a cluster of follicles (fruits) which split open to reveal deep-red, bean-like seeds. If the museum is open it is also well worth a visit.
- \*10 **Araucaria Avenue** Southern conifers (South America) New Caledonia, Australia, PNG  
This avenue of tall, southern hemisphere conifers, largely composed of Norfolk Island and New Caledonia pines, leads to a plaque marking the site of a 19<sup>th</sup> century asylum. The initial plantings in 1868 were designed to lead the patients down into the gardens. Other nearby species include bunya and hoop pines from Australia, as well as a Klink's pine from PNG with its unusual reddish-maroon, peeling bark. They are not pines, but species of *Araucaria* with a lineage dating back to the time of the dinosaurs. As it happens, there is a stand of one of the true pines (*Pinus brutia* with the familiar bundles of pine needles) at the end of the avenue, and the asylum memorial nearby is beneath a wild relative of the commercial *Pistacia vera* (#7).