

Points of Interest February 2010



Welcome to Chelsea Physic Garden, London's oldest botanic garden, founded in 1673. You will find the plants mentioned in this month's Points of Interest marked by green alphabetical labels in the Garden.

- A.** The Snowdrop Theatre at the centre of the garden will prove irresistible to both seasoned Galanthophiles and new enthusiasts alike, who can admire at close range the delicate forms of our large collection of Snowdrops (*Galanthus*). Read more about them in the Garden's publication *Snowdrop Days*, available in the shop.
- B.** Heading towards the Embankment Gate notice how the woodland area is springing to life despite the chill in the air. Carpeting the ground, interspersed with Snowdrops, are *Eranthis hyemalis*. Also known as Winter Aconites, these bright yellow buttercup-like flowers are one of the first bulbs seen in the year. They take their opportunity to flower and set seed, then disappear back below ground before the canopy of overhead deciduous trees begins to cast too much shade.
- C.** Edging the central narrow woodland path are the evergreen shrubs known as *Sarcococca*, Sweet Box. Their small white flowers waft a tempting scent to attract pollinating bees. In the woodland *Sarcococca confusa* has the added attraction of black berries and *S. ruscifolia* var. *chinensis* has large red berries. *S. hookeriana* var. *digyna* has narrower leaves and delicate pink-tipped flowers.
- D.** Close by is the Chinese shrub *Chimonanthus praecox*, Winter Sweet, whose intense scent makes it an invaluable winter shrub that has been in cultivation in the West since 1766. The waxy pale yellow flowers with a purple stained centre are borne on bare stems. The petals have been used to flavour and scent tea.
- E.** On a cold or wet day take cover in our glasshouses. In the Mediterranean Glasshouse the bulb collection is starting to impress including the dwarf *Iris*s and *Muscari*. The palm (pictured above right) in the large central pot is *Phoenix theophrasti*, the Cretan Date Palm, one of the two species of palm native to the Mediterranean region.
- F.** In the heat of the Tropical Corridor the Orchid collection is starting to flower. On the display table at the west end is the impressive Slipper Orchid, *Paphiopedilum insigne*. On the display tree in the centre of the corridor *Cattleya* Orchid blooms are emerging. New orchid species are still being discovered at a rate of between 200 to 300 per year, mainly in tropical regions, making this diverse and exotic family the largest in the flowering plant world.
- G.** Also in the Tropical Corridor scented blossom can be found on the *Osmanthus fragrans* and the *Cinchona pubescens*. The latter is an important medicinal plant, as it contains the alkaloid quinine, used to treat many diseases including malaria. The tree is named after a Countess of Chinchon, the wife of a viceroy of Peru, who, in 1638, was introduced by natives to the medicinal properties of the bark.
- H.** In the Atlantic Islands Glasshouse *Nauplius sericeus* is flowering strongly. Its bright yellow daisy-like flowers are held above rosettes of silver-green leaves which are covered in minute fuzzy hairs. These plants are increasingly endangered in their native environment of the Canary Islands due to the pressures of tourism.



Phoenix theophrasti, the Cretan Date Palm, on display in the Mediterranean Glasshouse

Friends Membership Offer

Friends of the Garden benefit from **year-round access to the Garden**, even when it is closed to the general public, and can **bring one family guest** with them per visit. Friends can also exclusively book tables at our Café.

Join today and your admission fee will be deducted from your membership fee. Pay by Direct Debit and receive 15 months' membership for the price of 12.

To become a Friend, visit the Shop, call 020 7352 5646 ext 221 or see www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk/friends



Read more about galanthophilia and meet some famous galanthophiles in our publication **SNOWDROP DAYS**, available from the Shop or Kiosk at £4.

Map of Chelsea Physic Garden

66 Royal Hospital Road, London SW3 4HS



Notice to all visitors

- All plants are the property of Chelsea Physic Garden and thieves will be prosecuted.
- Many plants grown at Chelsea Physic Garden are poisonous and if eaten can cause death. **DO NOT EAT ANY PLANTS.**
- Children must be kept under close supervision at all times and are not permitted to go near the ponds.
- Please be aware that bees are kept in the Garden and that some plants can produce allergic skin reactions.
- Please report any accidents to a member of Garden staff immediately.