

Points of Interest July 2010



Welcome to Chelsea Physic Garden, London's oldest botanic garden, founded in 1673. As well as the plants listed below (identified in the Garden by green labels) we hope you enjoy the new display of plants found in a Jamaican 'Provision Ground' created to mark the 350th anniversary of Sir Hans Sloane's birth and his visit to the Caribbean in 1687.

A. Fortune's Tank Pond is now full of tadpoles, many of which are taking shelter under the waterlily pads. The pond contains one of our native waterlilies, *Nuphar lutea*, its thick rhizomes used to be ground up, mixed with tar and the resulting substance applied to the scalp as a cure for baldness.

B. The tall *Ginkgo biloba* (one male and one female) on either side of the path leading to the Embankment Gate, have been used in Chinese medicine for centuries to regulate blood circulation. If you look up you may just be able to see the seed ripening on the smaller, female tree.

C. The white mulberry *Morus alba*, found growing opposite the admission kiosk is a tree that was vital to the silk industry. The black mulberries, *Morus nigra*, beside the Garden of World Medicine and another near the large yew are now coming into fruit. The unripe fruit and green parts of the plant have a white sap that is intoxicating and mildly hallucinogenic. Anthocyanins found in the edible fruit have been used to treat cancer, bacterial infections and diabetes.

D. Beside the statue of Sir Hans Sloane you will find pots of *Puya alpestris*, 'Sapphire Tower' which is a member of the pineapple family and native to south America. The flowers are a combination of aquamarine petals and yellow stamens which contrast with the glaucous, serrated foliage. The little 'bars' protruding beyond the flowers are perches for hummingbirds, their pollinators.

E. North of the Swan Walk gate you will find the pomegranate tree, *Punica granatum* – described in the Bible as the 'tree of knowledge'. For millenia pomegranate, which is thought to have originated in Iran, has been medicinally important and rich in symbolism. The plant is also used in Ayurvedic medicine.

F. Under licence from the Home Office, we are growing hemp. A valuable oil and fibre crop, it is also the source of the illegal drug cannabis, however our plants of *Canabis sativa* lack the narcotic resins. Cannabis has a long history of use in traditional herbal medicine, and some sufferers of multiple sclerosis and cancer today use it to relieve their symptoms.

G. The Fibres Bed contains various plants that have been used through the ages for clothing, sacks, baskets and ropes for ships. A North American Indian would take 6-8 weeks to make a rope 3.5 meters long using the outer leaf edges of *Iris douglasiana*. The leaves of the date palm, *Phoenix dactylifera*, have a multitude of uses including mats and baskets and as well as being used in the manufacture of insulation boards.

Summer Late Openings

Don't miss our late openings which take place every Wednesday from 30 June to 1 September, when the Garden stays open until 10 pm. The Café will be offering a three-course menu for £23. Last admission is at 8.30 pm.



Punica granatum, pomegranates are now classed as a super-food, thought to ward off heart disease.

Friends Membership Offer

Friends of the Garden benefit from year-round access to the Garden, and can bring one family guest 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/



Exhibition in the Foyer

Elizabeth Blackwell's *A Curious Herbal* (above) from 1739 recorded the plants growing in the Garden. The tradition of painting and drawing plants in the Garden continues today through the Chelsea Physic Garden Florilegium Society. Their work is currently on display in the foyer.

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.