

Points of Interest – June 2009



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. To your left as you enter through the Swan Walk gate is the Swan Walk Border South, which contains a collection of plants from the Canary Islands, Madeira and the Azores. During the recent winter a number of them were damaged or killed by the frost and heavy snow. We have been fortunate to receive a donation of plants from the James Wong 'Canary Island Spa Garden' at this year's Chelsea Flower Show, which will help us to replant this area.

B. On the south side of Fortune's Tank Pond is the cornfield annuals display. This area shows plants that were once a common sight in the British countryside, but which have now largely disappeared as a result of changes in agricultural practices. Growing among the more well known flowers such as *Agrostemma githago* (Corncockle) and *Centaurea cyanus* (Cornflower) are *Misopates orontium* (Weasels Snout) and *Silene noctiflora* (Night Flowering Catchfly).

C. In the centre of the Garden is an 18th century rock garden, possibly the earliest in Europe. It was built with Icelandic lava rock, given to the Garden by Sir Joseph Banks, and stone from the Tower of London. Today, it contains a collection of Cretan endemics, including *Petromarula pinnata* (Wall Lettuce), a plant which can be seen growing in vertical rock faces and old buildings in Crete. The pond in the centre is an early Victorian addition.

D. Growing up the *Catalpa bignonioides* (Indian Bean Tree) on the Summary Bed is a magnificent specimen of the fragrant *Rosa brunonii* (Himalayan Musk Rose). It is a very vigorous plant which needs the support of a large tree to display it at its best. The Indian Bean Tree itself now has two large props for public safety, as it is at the end of its life.

E. Near the old *Cercis siliquastrum* (Judas Tree) is a small bed containing medicinal plants which are now endangered in the wild as a result of over-collection. Examples of such plants in the bed are *Sanguinaria canadensis* (Bloodroot) and *Caulophyllum thalictroides* (Blue Cohosh).

F. Near the shop, the plant theatre is currently showing our collection of chillies. There are over 1,700 varieties of chillies which come in a lot of different colours, shapes and sizes. They also vary a great deal in the heat they produce. *Capsicum chinense* 'Dorset Naga', which can be seen displayed here, is reputed to be the world's hottest chilli. Chillies, when ripe, have six times more vitamin C than an orange. **(Please do not handle).**

G. In the Tropical Corridor are a number of orchids in the genus *Stanhopea*, which grow in Central and Southern America. They bear spectacular, highly-scented, but short-lived flowers. The house has a particularly fine specimen of *Stanhopea oculata* 'Aurea' whose waxy flowers hang down underneath the container it grows in.

H. In the adjoining glasshouse is *Brighamia insignis* (Haha), a short-lived perennial plant in the same family as *Campanula*. This extremely rare plant is endemic to Hawaii where it grows in dry, rocky areas. Its only pollinator is an extinct hawk moth, which means that it cannot reproduce on its own.



Centaurea cyanus (Cornflower) is one of the native British plants that you will find growing alongside Fortune's Tank Pond in June

Friends Membership

As a charity with no Government support, we depend on visitor admissions revenue and Friends' subscriptions to fund the upkeep of this special garden. 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.

To encourage more visitors to join, we are offering new Friends **15 months' membership for the price of 12** when paying by Direct Debit. **Individual Membership is £30; Joint Membership is £40.**

Pick up a membership form in the exit foyer or shop, see www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk/friends or contact us on **020 7352 5646 x 221**, (10am-5pm, weekdays) with your debit or credit card details.



Map of Chelsea Physic Garden

66 Royal Hospital Road, London SW3 4HS



Warning to Adults and Children

The Chelsea Physic Garden grows some 5000 different plant taxa including collections of medicinal and Mediterranean plants, some of which are toxic. Children should be supervised at all times, especially in the Tropical Corridor, Pharmaceutical Beds and Poison Bed. Members of the Umbelliferae and Euphorbiaceae families growing in the order beds can produce allergic skin reactions in sunny weather. We also keep bees which are a potential hazard. Fortune's Tank Pond and the Pond Rockery are strictly off limits for children. Accidents should be reported to a member of staff immediately. For more information visit www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk

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