

## Points of Interest March 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.** Winter cough getting you down? Stroll over to the Cool Fernery entrance to admire Asia's cure-all for seasonal ills. The Loquat, *Eriobotrya japonica*, is valued for its antibacterial, analgesic and antiviral properties. It also makes a handsome wall shrub. Hailing from China and Japan its golden egg-shaped fruit is eaten fresh or cooked, when it's said to resemble the flavor of cherries with that perfect sugar/acid balance. And it's also got delicately scented flowers too.
- B.** Blink and you'll miss the diminutive *Hepatica nobilis* in front of the Cool Fernery. This gem of a shade plant savours the high leaf index of deciduous trees such as *Fagus sylvatica* under which it waits for winter snow melt or a glimmer of warmth to trigger it into growth. Commonly referred to as liver leaf, the Doctrine of Signatures historically suggested it treated liver disorders, but this later proved to be untrue. It's poisonous, but can be used in medicine to speed the healing of injuries.
- C.** Despite its resistance to vegetative propagation *Daphne bholua* 'Jaqueline Postill' has such an enticing scent that nurserymen continue to kowtow to its finicky requirements. Sniff it out in the bed at the south end of the Cool Fernery where it revels in the moist shady coolness. Despite its olfactory appeal, this Himalayan shrub's fibrous bark was often used for the production of paper and rope. Like other *Daphne* species it contains poisonous alkaloids.
- D.** If you've pruned a *Mahonia* you might have noticed that the wood beneath its bark often has a richer colour than its flowers. This vibrant yellow pigment can be used as dye but it's the fruits and roots of *Mahonia napaulensis* and other species that really interest chemists. Berberine, a chemical which can be found in their roots, is an anti-bacterial, while the fruits are used as a diuretic to treat dysentery. Find flowering specimens of *M. napaulensis* in the Woodland and in the Order Beds behind the Entry Kiosk.
- E.** Native *Daphne*, *D. laureola*, is nothing if not understated with its little chartreuse flowers and mellifluous aroma. It's starting to establish on the bank by Fortune's Tank Pond and will eventually make a 1m high shrub. It's gently sprinkled throughout chalky areas in the UK but is an unwanted immigrant in the US where it is classified a noxious weed. Like our other native *Daphne D. mezereum*, all parts are poisonous to humans but the berries make great elevenses for the birds.
- F.** Brightening up the shady Mediterranean woodland with tiny white flowers from now until May is the Tree Heath – *Erica arborea*. Distributed through the Mediterranean and much of Northern and Central Africa, it's a tough adaptable shrub that's happiest in an acid soil. In maturity it can reach 5m or more with a stiff columnar silhouette. Flavonoids found in its fine leaves are thought to provide healthy antioxidants, while its roots are used as carved tobacco pipes.
- G.** Head into the conservatory by the main building and you'll find *Aloe x principis* – there's been just enough winter sun to persuade this spiny South African succulent to flower. Nearby is the better known Aloe species – *A. vera*, famed for its skin healing properties. Aloe species can be found throughout Africa and the Arabian peninsula. In South Africa some single-trunked Aloe species are referred to as quiver trees because their hollowed stems were used as arrow holders by the Khoisan.



The berries of *Daphne laureola*, Growing on the bank by Fortune's Tank Pond, make great elevenses for birds.

### 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.

Pay by Direct Debit and receive 15 months' membership for the price of 12.

To become a Friend, visit the Office, call 020 7352 5646 or see [www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk/friends](http://www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk/friends)

### Café and Shop

The Café and Shop will reopen again on Thursday 1 April. From then until Sunday 31 October their opening times will be:  
Sundays & Bank Holidays 12–6pm  
Wednesdays – Fridays 12–5pm.

### Easter openings at the Garden

Good Friday, 2 April 12–5pm  
Easter Sunday, 4 April 12–6pm  
Easter Monday, 5 April 12–6pm  
Closed Saturday 3 April

# 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.