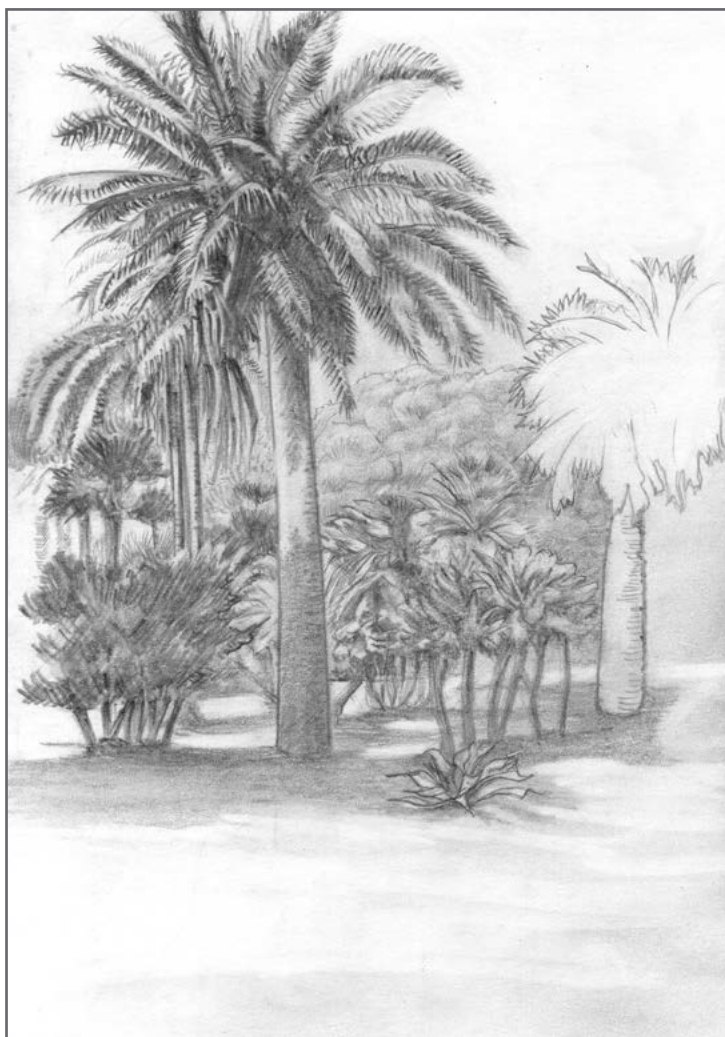


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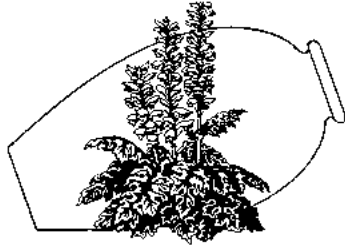
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# **THE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN**





## THE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN

A journal for gardeners in all the  
mediterranean climate regions of the world

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*Editor*

Caroline Harbouri

*Translation*

Edith Haeuser (from Spanish)

*Illustrations*

Freda Cox (pp. iv, 12, 14, 20), Christine Cresswell (pp. 7, 18, 53), Geoff Crowhurst (p. 56), Clare Doig (pp. 45, 47, 74), Katharine Fedden (p. 11), John Jefferis (cover), Kate Marcelin-Rice (p. 34), Simon Rackham (pp. 59, 62), Cheryl Renshaw (p. 65), Leto Seferiades (p. 16), Derek Toms (pp. 9, 26, 42), Chevrel Traher (p. 67), Christoph Wieschus (p. 24), Simon Windeler (p. 30).

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\* \* \*

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For details, subscriptions, etc. contact The Secretary, MGS, PO Box 14, Peania, GR-19002 Greece, email [mgssecretary@gmail.com](mailto:mgssecretary@gmail.com).

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Articles, letters, comments and items of information for *The Mediterranean Garden* should be sent to Caroline Harbouri, Phyllidos 6, Athens 118 51, Greece. Tel. (+30) 210 3460 398, email [petrie@otenet.gr](mailto:petrie@otenet.gr).

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The cover illustration of palms in the garden of the Villa Whitaker, Malfitano, Sicily is by John Jefferis.



A *Freesia* hybrid  
drawing by Freda Cox



## **From the President: THE 100TH EDITION OF TMG**

The MGS journal was launched in Summer 1995, jointly edited by Caroline Harbourn and Derek Toms. Its “Meditorial” acknowledged the unique quality of this publication, noting that this “milestone” could not have been reached without the splendid efforts of its contributors. Since that day, ninety-nine journals have followed, all filled with articles on diverse topics and featuring plants, gardens and events around the world, written and illustrated by our members. The standard of both the text and the accompanying black and white illustrations has been excellent. I joined the MGS a little while after its inception, and the first *TMG* I received was No. 3, Winter 1995/6. I was delighted with its content and format compared to the glossy magazines (from the UK) which I subscribed to at that time. By Summer 1997 when I wrote my first article for the MGS in *TMG* 9, I felt I knew a number of members well through their articles and was confident to share with them my thoughts on “Evening Primroses in the Antipodes”. It is this continuing link with members/friends around the world which makes our journal such a valuable part of membership. I thank all of you who have made contributions through the years and long may they continue. I also give a very special thank you to Caroline Harbourn who has steered the journal to its present longer format, packed full of interesting articles, ideas and comment. Her own writing for the journal is unsurpassed and I refer you to her article in this edition: “Sparozza: What the Garden Is (and Isn’t)”. Caroline knew Sparozza before the Society was conceived of and although I have known the garden for a long time too, and have always admired its philosophy of working with nature, I found her article one of the most inspiring I have ever read about our headquarters.

Here in Australia, our South Australia Branch is celebrating its 20th anniversary in April with special events in Adelaide and a party at Beaumont House. This National Trust property has one of the earliest Mediterranean gardens in South Australia, having been established in 1846 by Samuel Davenport when

he started planting olives, grapes, figs, almonds, pencil pines, stone pines, palms and mulberries, recognising the suitability of the climate for Mediterranean crops and trees. I am thrilled to be attending and look forward to my tour of the garden which I have never visited before. The inception of the SA Branch followed the visit to Australia of Heidi Gildemeister, our second President, promoting the Society and highlighting the advantages of forming local branches. Here in Victoria we are also in our 20th year, following the same visit. As we are about to host our Second Pan-Australian Conference at Castlemaine, in the harsh but uplifting environment of Central Victoria, we intend to celebrate our milestone later this year.

Speaking of milestones, I have long cherished my Life Membership of the MGS, having taken advantage of this offer when it was available. With my busy work schedule it was always hard to remember subscription deadlines, so the offer was a godsend. It was a long time ago and as I recall a handsome sum was paid in drachmas. When I became President in 2016, I realised that I was now receiving the benefits of membership at the cost of the Society, so I made a donation equivalent to five years' membership. While I am not asking other Life Members to match my donation, I am extending an appeal to you all to consider making one, however small, as we rely mainly on income from subscriptions. I am linking my appeal to an initiative we have planned in order to make more information available for visitors to Sparoza. In the pipeline is a booklet which will have photographs of certain parts of the garden taken from the same viewpoint at different seasons, with accompanying captions and text. If you are interested in supporting this venture, please refer to the Donations section on our website: [www.mediterraneangardensociety.org](http://www.mediterraneangardensociety.org).

After creating our Facebook Page some six years ago and being responsible for its daily photograph with informative text, Alisdair Aird stepped down from this role at the end of February. I thank him warmly for all the joy he has given members and non-members around the world with an astonishing array of gardens and plant material for mediterranean gardeners. He will be sorely missed, but I am pleased to let you know that Ioannis Gryllis has agreed to take on the Facebook page and he

has ideas on how to involve more of us in its content. Alisdair has also long served as the main moderator for our Plant Forum as well and I am grateful to Yvonne Barton who is going to take over this role, but of a Forum in a simplified form, although still generating the same in-depth discussions on plants. In future, membership will be available only to MGS members; however, those existing non-members who contribute so much to the content at present will still be a valuable part of it.

I have been very touched by the many emails of concern and sympathy which I've received since before Christmas regarding the catastrophic bushfires which engulfed a large part of Australia during the summer, following the relentless drought beforehand, and which burnt out a third of the forests of south-east Australia. For the first time in our history, nearly everyone in Australia knew someone who was affected. There were days when I was hearing from members in three continents. In particular I mention Moira Thomson, an MGS friend in Portugal, who let me know that she had hosted a Western Algarve Gardening Group Plant Exchange at her garden in February and that the donations made were being sent to an appropriate Australian charity for a replanting initiative. I cannot thank her enough. Our country has long been in the forefront in all sorts of endeavours, but to be world leaders in such a tragedy only highlights the dire necessity for the whole world to act now. The loss of human life, houses, farming stock and property, bushland, native wildlife and birds has been hard to read about at times and many of our unique native animals are close to extinction.

I have read with interest the ideas of many plant and garden experts on how we should proceed with plantings in our own gardens to withstand the changing climate and the infernos which now come with it. As Fran Faul wrote in a recent Victoria Branch newsletter, "The first line of defence should be deciduous trees, some evergreen trees and some trees of sub-tropical and tropical rainforests. These trees have more moisture in their leaves which act as air-conditioners within the canopy." She pointed out that the foliage of both conifers and eucalyptus are high in flammable oils. Megan Backhouse, another MGS member and Gardening Editor of Melbourne's

*The Age* newspaper, went on to discuss the question of mulch, recommending that inorganic mulches such as “gravel or granitic sand” are safer than straw and wood chips which are highly flammable. This ties in with Olivier Filippi’s observations in his book *Bringing the Mediterranean into your Garden* which is fast becoming my bible. He notes that an inorganic mulch such as gravel is better suited to dry-climate plants than an organic mulch which will break down to a humus far too rich for such plants. Meanwhile I read with sorrow that at Melbourne’s Royal Botanic Gardens a much-loved oak on the famous Oak Lawn, *Quercus* aff. *alba*, a North American species planted in 1862, had died – a casualty of Melbourne’s hotter, dryer weather, which had made it more susceptible to the insect and fungal damage which was found within it. No more shall we enjoy the display of daffodils in spring beneath its canopy, but the tree will be replaced with an oak selected to be better equipped for our changing climate, in line with the Gardens’ Landscape Succession Strategy launched in 2016 where hundreds of possible new and exciting species, never considered appropriate for Melbourne before, are being investigated for their ability to cope with our increasing temperatures.

We have to continue gardening despite the climatic setbacks, but looking at it with different eyes to ensure that this pleasure endures for us all.

*Caroline Davies*  
*cdgt@netspace.net.au*

# SPAROZA: WHAT THE GARDEN IS (AND ISN'T)

Caroline Harbouri

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I first visited Sparoza long before the MGS was dreamt of, even before Sally Razelou arrived there. This was in 1984, in the year following Jaqueline Tyrwhitt's death, when Stephen Grigg, her last gardener, was still in residence. When she created the garden Jaqueline Tyrwhitt was very much a pioneer in the use of native plants, and an early recogniser too that the mediterranean garden year begins in autumn with the first rains, rather than in spring.\* Over the years since that day I have watched the garden of Sparoza develop. In this 100th issue of *TMG* I'd like to consider just what sort of garden it is.

To start with, it is a garden made on poor, stony, alkaline soil, in places very shallow. Its climate is typically mediterranean, with hot, dry summers (up to 40 °C or more) and wet (usually) winters. In addition it is swept by a strong, drying, northerly wind in summer, the *meltemi*. It doesn't really make much sense to give a figure for average annual rainfall since there is a very great variation from year to year in both the amount of rain and its month-by-month distribution; however, a very approximate figure might be about 450mm, but this of course is averaging out both the wet years and the dry years. I have never forgotten my father-in-law telling me that he remembered a year in his youth – in the 1920s I think – when there was no rain at all in Athens between February and the end of November: just imagine trying to keep a garden going through that... To go back a couple of millennia, the archaeologist Judith Binder told me that the sudden hugely increased layer of votive offerings dating from the early 8th century BC found at the shrine of Ombrios Zeus, in other words Zeus the Rain-Giver, on Mount Hymettus suggests the occurrence of a serious and prolonged drought at that time. Mount Hymettus, incidentally, overlooks the Mesogeia Plain where Sparoza is situated.

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\* See her book *Making a Garden on a Greek Hillside*, 1998, Denise Harvey (Publisher).

Give or take a few local variations, these are the conditions typically faced by gardeners all over the mediterranean world. And they are thus of course what make Sparoza so perfectly suited to be the garden of a Society concerned with mediterranean gardening.

Olivier Filippi, the doyen of dry-climate gardening, points out how little it avails us to fight against nature – for nature always wins; the mediterranean gardener has to work within the constraints of climate and soil rather than struggle fruitlessly to circumvent them. Indicatively, the original French title of his masterly first book, *The Dry Gardening Handbook* (reissued by Filbert Press, 2019), is *Pour un jardin sans arrosage*, in other words ‘For a garden without watering’. His own demonstration garden at Mèze, near Montpellier, is a place of great beauty – see many of the photographs in his books – where no plant receives any watering at all after its establishment period. Sparoza follows the same climate-compatible principles, although some parts of the garden do receive a moderate amount of summer water. Conditions vary from place to place: while Filippi’s garden is situated beside the Étang de Thau lagoon and thus has a reasonably humid atmosphere even at the height of summer, the atmosphere at Sparoza is exceptionally dry, with the result that some of the plants grown without any irrigation by Filippi cannot survive at Sparoza without at least a modicum of water. I am not speaking theoretically here – plants from Filippi’s nursery which have been tried at Sparoza without water and have failed include among others *Catananche caerulea*, *Verbascum olympicum*, *Erica multiflora* and *Genista aetnensis*. *Achillea coarctata* and *Lavandula* ‘Goodwin Creek Grey’ lived for only a couple of years.

Trying out plants: this brings us to another aspect of the Sparoza garden, its experimental work. Species that look as if they might be suitable are planted, whereupon, as any gardener might expect, some live and some promptly die. Of the plants that survive, those that appear to be flourishing rather than merely miserably hanging on are propagated in Sparoza’s nursery and tried out in other positions. (The nursery is necessarily the biggest consumer of water in the garden.) Position is all-important; experimentation is complemented by close observation. Sally Razelou has noted, for example, that in years of extreme drought the neighbouring presence of a tree providing shade for part

of the day can make the difference between life and death for stalwart plants that are normally drought-tolerant, such as old rosemaries in the unwatered planting around the ‘threshing floor’. She has also observed how an unwatered plant may benefit from ‘borrowed water’, namely a slight increase in soil moisture resulting from the watering of a nearby plant.



Spherical seedheads of *Lomelosia minoana*  
drawing by Christine Cresswell

Ideally, anyone interested in the Sparoza garden should visit it at different seasons. But of course this often isn't possible, especially for those who have to travel long distances to come to Greece. From this point of view Lilian Hayball's comments in her article in *TMG 99* are interesting, for she had a shorter distance to travel – from Cyprus – and was lucky enough to be able to visit Sparoza in both March and October 2019. In March she saw it full of flowers after an unusually wet winter, while in October she saw it at its driest after a rainless September following the normal drought of summer. Two things she noticed in October are worth mentioning here: the dried seedheads on various plants and, in places, the bare earth. Many mediterranean plants have striking architectural forms when dry and/or very decorative seedheads (for example the large, spherical papery seedheads of *Lomelosia minoana* which remain on the plant all summer long, and the straw-coloured ‘daisies’ of *Phagnalon rupestre*). Cleared, dry, bare earth is something that seems to shock many people, yet, if one thinks about it, it is an integral part of the rhythm of a mediterranean garden – the resting period in summer. Personally I see bare, dry

earth as restful in itself, a quiet pause before the prodigal growth of winter and spring. Then too when their flowering season is over the aromatic foliage of so many mediterranean plants gives another dimension to the garden – and bare earth adds scents of its own: the wonderful subtle smell as it cools down at nightfall after a hot, hot day and of course the delicious petrichor or fragrance of thirsty earth drinking when the first rains fall.

The resting period in summer is when many mediterranean plants become dormant and lose all their leaves. These bare plants don't represent a failure on the part of the gardener but rather his or her respect for the plants' natural cycles. Among such plants at Sparoza are *Euphorbia dendroides* (the tree euphorbia), *Euphorbia acanthothamnos* (the Greek spiny spurge) and the beautiful pink-flowered Cretan endemic *Ebenus cretica*. It is not just that these plants can survive without water in summer, it is that they *don't want it*; if you water *Ebenus cretica*, for example, or the tree euphorbia in summer you will quite simply kill them pretty quickly. While they are asleep and leafless one can enjoy their bare shapes. The two euphorbias, *E. dendroides* and *E. acanthothamnos*, are particularly visually interesting: the former with its regularly-branched silhouette and the latter with an even dome of intricately interlaced and geometric thorns. Then when at last the first rains arrive they suddenly and swiftly green up again.

There are other plants whose strategy for getting through the dry summer is not complete dormancy and total defoliation but rather a dramatic shrinking of their leaves to minimise water loss through evapotranspiration. *Ptilostemon chamaepeuce* which in spring forms such glorious mounds with pinky-mauve thistle-like flowers, beside the 'threshing floor' for instance, is one such plant. Others in the terraces at Sparoza are the silvery *Anthyllis barba-jovis* and *Artemisia californica* (the California sagebrush). I must admit to having a soft spot for the specimen of *Artemisia californica* at Sparoza, for it was I who gave it to the garden in 2008. Three or four years ago I visited Sparoza twice in late August, two days apart, and on the intervening day the first rain fell (it was early that year). I inspected this *Artemisia* as usual on my first visit and found it fairly bare with sparse, shrunken leaves, looking moribund to the untutored eye; two days later it was covered with a green fuzz of minute new leaf buds.



A further method of reducing evapotranspiration adopted by some plants, for example *Phlomis* species, is to hold their leaves vertically during the hot months, relaxing them once more into a spreading position when the rains begin. This means, of course, that during summer the plants look less 'full'. An awareness of these adaptations to cope with drought enables us to understand better the varying appearance of a climate-compatible garden like Sparoza at different times of year.



*Ptilostemon chamaepeuce*  
drawing by Derek Toms

Bulbous species avoid the summer heat and drought by retreating underground. Anyone visiting Sparoza only during the dry period might thus not suspect the richness of its collection of geophytes in the phrygana area, on the hillside and scattered throughout the garden. Indeed, these days a greater variety of geophytes is seen at Sparoza than in the surrounding Attica landscape. Among the first to appear are the sea squill, *Drimia maritima*, with its stately tall spire of white flowers (even before the first rain – apparently its trigger is the shortening of the days) and the ever-spreading little pink *Cyclamen graecum*. In the phrygana area too at different seasons are *Amaryllis belladonna*, *Iris* × *germanica* (mostly purple) and the greeny-brown widow iris,

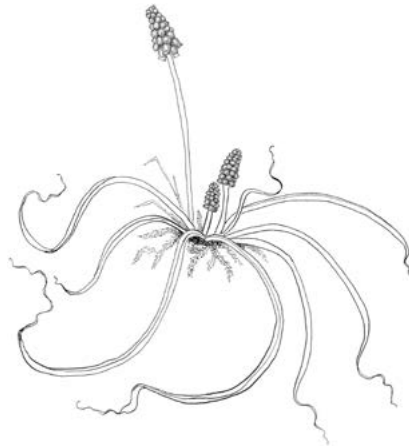
*Iris tuberosa* (formerly known by the much more evocative name *Hermodactylus tuberosus*). *Narcissus obsoletus* is also found here, as well as on the hillside and in other parts of the garden; the height of its flowering stems depends on the dryness of the season – in very dry autumns it is tiny. *Narcissus papyraceus* also thrives in winter or early spring and spreads its fragrance everywhere in the garden, including in the phrygana area. Sternbergias stand out in autumn with their bright yellow crocus-like flowers, both *Sternbergia lutea* and *S. sicula*. Later on comes *Anemone coronaria*, flowering profusely in shades of pink and mauve, so characteristic of Sparoza and unmissable as one approaches on the road that curves round the phrygana area. Little clumps of the autumn squill, *Prospero autumnale*, and grape hyacinths, both *Muscari neglectum* and the tasselled *Leopoldia comosa*, pop up here and there, while *Ornithogalum umbellatum* self-seeds freely. The lovely mauve *Crocus goulimyi*, one of the many bulbs in the phrygana area, is also to be seen in Derek’s Garden, as is *C. cartwrightianus*; the latter can be found on the hillside too where it likes to spread into the paths. Sally Razelou has observed that the same tendency to grow on the hillside paths is true of the minute *Colchicum cupanii*; she attributes this to the fact that on the paths these bulbs’ seeds are helpfully trodden into the ground by the feet of passing humans and dogs, as well as to the lack of competition there from the many wild flowers of the Asteraceae family that flourish on the hillside in winter and spring. In the garden, a handsome Greek endemic in the top terrace is the black-flowered *Fritillaria obliqua*.

There are of course also geophytes that are not native to Greece: the pretty little *Freesia leichtlinii* has recently been planted by the ‘threshing floor’, while *Gladiolus tristis* has long graced the planting beneath the east veranda.

To increase their populations, many of the bulbs at Sparoza are propagated by seed in the nursery, grown on and then planted out. Rarer bulbs donated to the garden, such as the delightful little *Leucojum ionicum* (syn. *Acis ionica*), are kept in pots.

Naturally, when we visit gardens we all bring with us our preconceptions of how a garden should be. It would be easy to say when faced with the parched Sparoza that Lilian Hayball and other AGM participants saw in October 2019, “Give it some water, for heaven’s sake, to make it look better”. But – quite apart from the fact that water is a precious resource to be used

wisely, which is likely to become scarcer in some regions as a result of the climate crisis – this would be to go against the core principle of Sparoza. As I hope I have indicated above, it is a garden managed in such a way as to be in keeping with its Attica climate and to respect the requirements of the many mediterranean plants cultivated here, including the need of some for summer dormancy. It is *not* a garden that remains green and lush throughout the summer. Such a garden can no doubt be achieved by anyone willing to give copious amounts of water – but to do this would be to defeat the purpose of Sparoza as a climate-compatible waterwise garden, better able to withstand the extremes of heat and drought that our changing climate may bring. ‘Be prepared’ should be the watchwords of us all, not only of Baden-Powell’s Boy Scout movement.



*Muscari neglectum*

drawing by Katharine Fedden

It would also be easy to say, “If the soil is so poor, improve it, bring in new topsoil”. This too would be to misunderstand the requirements of the kinds of plants grown at Sparoza. I can’t do better than quote Olivier Filippi on the need, on the contrary, (counterintuitive to many gardeners) to *impoverish* the soil if one wants to grow the thousands of mediterranean plants native to the garrigue: “instead of preparing the ground carefully before planting by improving it with organic matter to enrich it and retain moisture in the soil, we need to [...] impoverish the soil

as much as possible by, if need be, adding stones, pebbles or sand” (*Bringing the Mediterranean into your Garden*, Filbert Press, 2019). So many of the plants we grow in mediterranean gardens and see at Sparoza, such as lavenders, cistuses, rosemaries, origanums, teucrums and so much else, have evolved to thrive on poor stony soils. This is where they feel at home; they *do not want* manure and fertilisers and rich soil, which shorten their lives drastically. All they demand of us is perfect drainage.

Jaqueline Tyrwhitt wrote of the tough conditions of Sparoza that any plant which survived here would be likely to do even better elsewhere. I hope in this article I have managed to convey something of the principles and practices of Sparoza and how they exemplify at the same time both the frugality and the magnificent prodigality of a truly Mediterranean garden.

For photographs of Sparoza and its plants see the MGS website ([www.mediterraneangardensociety.org/journal-100.html](http://www.mediterraneangardensociety.org/journal-100.html)).



*Ebenus cretica*  
drawing by Freda Cox

# THE SEASONAL JOYS OF GROWING BULBS

Gloria Leinbach

---

When I first began gardening in coastal Los Angeles over forty years ago I made frequent forays to local nursery centres. Although I loved the colourful early spring annuals such as delphiniums, pansies and stocks, I quickly realised the folly of spending money every year on non-mediterranean plants that flower, produce seed, and die every season. Now, older and wiser, I invest my resources on a wide range of perennial geophytes or plants that propagate from underground storage organs such as bulbs, tubers and rhizomes. There are abundant mediterranean geophytes that provide my garden with seasonal colour and fragrance, and increase rather than decrease in quantity every year.

The mild winter season here by the coast is what I consider Spring I. *Narcissus papyraceus* or Paperwhites begin the season, appearing in October and perfuming the air with their heavenly fragrance. *Narcissus* belongs to the Amaryllidaceae family which is native to areas of Europe, North Africa and Asia that surround the Mediterranean Sea. *Narcissus jonquilla* and *N. tazetta* add cheerful colour to grey days and repeat well in warm-winter areas, especially the early-blooming varieties that will not wilt in heat waves.

*Leucojum aestivum* is another member of the Amaryllidaceae family that puts on an amazing show in winter; I find the delicate green dots decorating the tips of each white flower enchanting. Unfortunately, *Leucojum* is not widely grown here in Southern California despite its reliability. It is a European genus with species commonly known as snowflakes. *Leucojum* is often confused with *Galanthus*, commonly known as snowdrops. According to research published in July 2004 for the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew, *Leucojum* and *Galanthus* are closely related and have similar green markings on their petals.

*Chasmanthe* is another corm that is often confused with *Crocsmia* and *Tritonia*, although DNA tests reveal a closer relationship with *Babiana*. *Chasmanthe* is a genus within the Iridaceae family indigenous to South Africa. In Southern

California, the bright orange-red blooms of *Chasmanthes* light up my garden and attract hungry hummingbirds in early winter when nectar plants are not plentiful. Although *Chasmanthes* becomes weedy and self-sows easily, some favourable attributes are that it requires no irrigation and the abundant flower stalks make attractive flower arrangements.



*Galanthus nivalis*  
drawing by Freda Cox

*Scilla peruviana* is also easily grown in sandy soil and requires minimal irrigation; it is prolific on steep dry banks or in gently-sloped garden beds. Perhaps the hardest aspect of growing bulbs is the confusing nature of all the reclassifications. Take *Scilla peruviana* for example; the proposed name change for this species is *Oncostema peruviana*. *Oncostema* is a proposed new genus consisting of ten *Scilla* species in the western Mediterranean region. Regardless of the possible name change, the bulb is native to Portugal, Spain and southern Italy, but not Peru. Apparently the story told in *Col. Gray's Hardy Bulbs* (1930s) is that the bulb arrived in Bristol, England on a ship named 'The Peru'. Colonel Gray stated that the botanist Carolus Clusius or Charles de l'Ecluse (1526-1609) did not know the bulb's natural origin, or concealed it to make it more highly esteemed. We do know that in 1560 the Fugger banking family sent Clusius on a

plant-collecting expedition to Spain and, as a result, he became familiarised with New World plants including bulbs.

*Hyacinthoides hispanica* (syn. *Scilla hispanica*) is native to Spain, Portugal and north-west Africa. As a genus, *Scilla* used to be in the Liliaceae family but has recently been reassigned to the Hyacinthaceae family. In my garden *Hyacinthoides hispanica* produces massive drifts of blue flowers that are stunning in winter; I manage the speedy proliferation of these bulbs by spreading them throughout my beds and sharing them with friends.

Although not as showy as *Hyacinthoides hispanica*, *Ipheion* 'Rolf Fiedler' also naturalises well and provides a low carpet of blue flowers in the winter. *Ipheion* is a small genus in the Alliaceae (onion) family that is indigenous to Argentina and Uruguay but thrives in Southern California. In 1963 the American botanist Hamilton P. Traub proposed moving *Ipheion* to the genus *Tristagma*; his research is widely but not universally accepted. Despite these changes, speciality catalogues continue to market these bulbs as *Ipheion*.

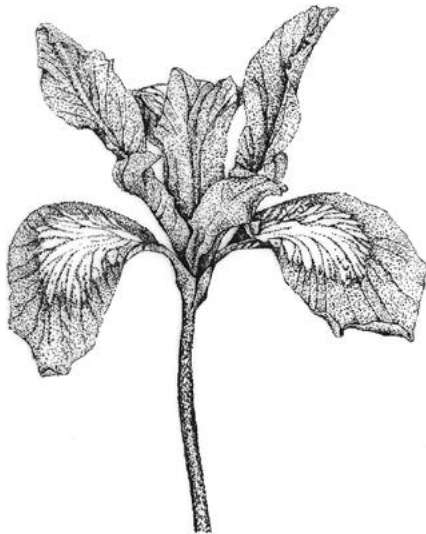
Bulb catalogues offer a dizzying array of tulips, but the species *Tulipa saxatilis* is one of a few reliable repeaters in our climate zones 9 and 10. The *Tulipa* genus belongs to the Liliaceae family and is indigenous to Europe, Western to Central Asia and North Africa. Fancy Dutch hybrids are treated as annuals here in Southern California; by contrast, species tulips naturalise and are a charming addition to rock or container gardens.

Freesias also thrive in rock gardens, I plant mine close to paths, spilling over retaining walls, and in containers around my back patio. This strategic placement allows one to breathe in their intoxicating scent that lingers in the air. *Freesia* is a genus in the Iridaceae family; there are approximately 14 species from the winter rainfall region of southern Africa. Because of their popularity, *Freesia laxa* has many colourful hybrids available and their zygomorphic symmetry makes them uniquely beautiful as cut flowers.

Dutch irises are also excellent cut flowers and have colours that range from pure white to blues, yellows and bronzes. The *Iris* genus consists of more than 300 species, hybrids and cultivars, making it the largest group in the Iridaceae family. Bulbous irises or Spanish irises are in the subgenus *Xiphium*; they are indigenous to Spain and other Mediterranean areas.

Dutch Irises are hybrids of *Iris xiphium*, *Iris tingitana* and *Iris latifolia*.

Bearded irises also consist of hundreds of hybrids, mostly belonging to the subgenus *Iris* that includes rhizomatous plants with fans of leaves and bearded falls. During the MGS trip (May 2018) to Umbria and Lazio, we were spellbound by the visit to Iris Umbria's nursery collection with more than 600 iris hybrids and old garden roses (rose hybrids created before 1868). With so many iris varieties to choose from, it is a wonder that I still prefer my heirloom European hybrid *Iris* × *germanica*. 'Grandma's Purple Flag' is found in old home sites throughout America and in California gardens. Local horticulturalists believe it might be 'Crimson King', an 1893 Peter Barr hybrid. Regardless, this iris is exceptionally hardy, repeats well and is a beautiful shade of purple, especially in softer winter sun.



*Iris douglasiana*  
drawing by Leto Seferiades

Moving into late winter or what I call Spring II, our California species irises are pretty but not exceptionally hardy. Locally, they are considered garden divas at best. These beardless irises are in the series Californicae and consist of 12-14 species native to our western coast. I opted for *Iris douglasiana* because it is the



easiest of the Pacific Coast species to grow; it tolerates my dry summer slope and more alkaline soils.

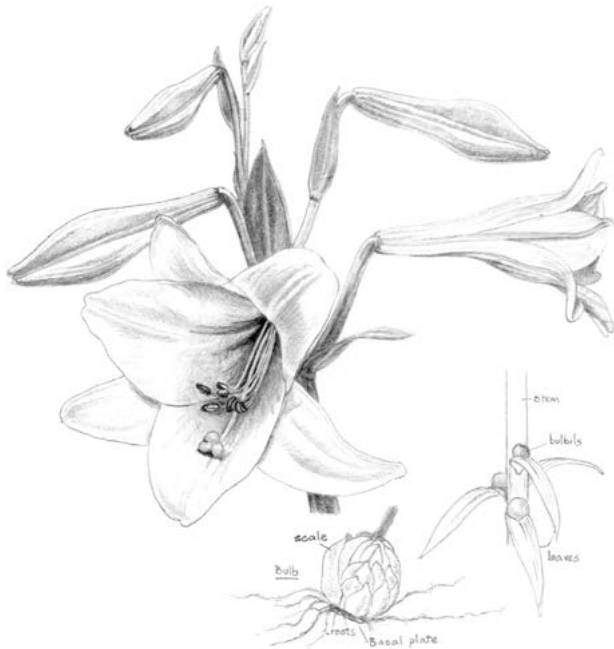
On the other hand, *watsonias* tolerate many different soil conditions, making them very colourful and reliable late winter/early spring bloomers. The genus falls within the Iridaceae family (subfamily Crocoideae) which has over 50 species indigenous to southern Africa. I love the sword-shaped leaves of *Watsonia borbonica* and its pastel flower spikes which attract hummingbirds and pollinators. This species also becomes weedy if not divided but, interestingly, it blooms best in the wild after a fire. *Watsonia* has found a suitable home here in California.

Novice bulb growers often confuse *Watsonia borbonica* with *Gladolius*. The name of the latter derives from *gladius*, a short sword in Roman times. The Roman author Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79) used *gladius* to describe the sword-shaped leaves of the species he was familiar with. A popular legend states that gladiators who survived their fights were showered with gladioli. The genus is the largest in the Iridaceae family with around 255 species. *Gladolius* species are found in Asia, Mediterranean Europe, and south and tropical Africa.

Recently, on the tour to Pelion after the AGM in Greece in October 2019, participants were curious about a beautiful potted plant with sword-shaped leaves growing in a courtyard garden. I believed the common name was peacock orchid, but this plant, wrongly sold as an orchid, is correctly identified as *Gladiolus murielae*, formerly known as *Acidanthera bicolor*. In my garden, this nocturnally fragrant beauty brightens up perennial beds in fall, whereas the softer-hued spring hybrid gladioli offer stately grandeur to the back of garden beds. ‘Glads’, as they are commonly referred to here, multiply profusely every year and are wonderful for tall flower arrangements and for sharing with friends.

Another favourite cut flower bulb with exotic fragrance is *Lilium*. The lilies begin their show in spring and continue into early summer. *Lilium* is a large genus in the Liliaceae family that numbers around 100 species. They range from Europe, North America and Asia south to the Philippines. *Lilium asiaticum* blooms first, its brilliant orange-red flowers really making a statement in my garden. It is easy to grow and increases every year. The next to bloom is the white Oriental hybrid *Lilium longiflorum* that is sold in nurseries and grocery stores around

Easter and is commonly referred to as the Easter lily. Even though the species is native to Japan and survives zone 1 winter outdoors, they reappear every spring for me in my zone 10.



*Lilium longiflorum*

drawing by Christine Cresswell

*Lilium* ‘Black Beauty’ also reliably reappears in early summer. Since this is my favourite lily, I inspect the garden weekly, eagerly awaiting the appearance of the new growth. ‘Black Beauty’ is an heirloom Oriental hybrid of *L. henryi* and *L. speciosum* created by Leslie Woodriff (1957). Originally a sterile diploid, when converted to tetraploid form it became the basis of many other popular hybrids. These exotic speckled lilies are reminiscent of the California native *Lilium humboldtii*, which does very well in sunny or semi-shade dry gardens here.

*Clivia miniata* also thrives in dry shade gardens throughout California. The genus belongs to the Amaryllidaceae family and comes from South Africa. Clivias are rhizomatous plants with thick, branching roots. Their stately flowers and deep

green foliage make them a beloved spring bloomer here in Southern California. Recently, hybridisers have developed additional colours, so in addition to bright orange we are now seeing gorgeous yellows, peaches, pinks and some near-whites. Our Southern California branch of the MGS visited the Getty Center in Los Angeles in November 2016. Upon our arrival, we noted that *Clivia miniata* lined both sides of the shaded entrance and was still blooming in April; what a colourful welcome! In Howard Koopowitz's book *Clivias*, he states that they tolerate abuse and neglect, and "are difficult to kill." No wonder clivias are so popular in local gardens.

Kniphofias, or red hot pokers, are becoming increasingly popular here in dry California as they tolerate abuse and neglect well. Our prolonged drought (2006-2017) insightfully forced cultural shifts. Some cities within Los Angeles County actually paid residents to dig up their lawns and replant with approved drought-resistant plants. A greater environmental awareness occurred within this shift, and Los Angelinos sought out waterwise plants that also fed wildlife, especially butterflies, hummingbirds and pollinators. Kniphofias are among a growing list of hummingbird-friendly plants here now. The genus includes around 70 species in the Asphodelaceae family that are rhizomatous or have fleshy roots. Kniphofias are found in Africa, Madagascar and Yemen, but most hybrids are from South African species.

One more rhizomatous or fleshy-rooted bulb is *Agapanthus*, locally known as Lily of the Nile despite having no relationship to Egypt or to lilies. *Agapanthus* is the only genus now listed in the Agapanthaceae family from South Africa. Once considered to be in the Alliaceae family, the foliage of *Agapanthus* lacks an onion or garlic smell. DNA sequencing points to a closer relationship with Amaryllidaceae. In a similar manner to clivias, *Agapanthus* is used extensively in city, commercial and private landscapes here in Southern California. Plants are prized for their strap-like leaves and flowering umbels of blue or white growing atop tall stems. Capitalising on their diversity, hybridisers have introduced cultivars that come in a wide range of blues, have varying heights and flower sizes, and repeat bloom, making them even more popular.

An exceptionally popular and diverse group of bulbs here in zones 9 and 10 are the *Hippeastrum* hybrids. Their

common name, Christmas amaryllis, refers to bulbs that are forced into bloom during the holiday season and sold in local stores and catalogues. If planted in the ground, they bloom from late March through April. *Hippeastrum* is a genus in the Amaryllidaceae family, with approximately 70-90 species and 600-plus hybrids. The genus is native to tropical regions of the Caribbean and Mexico, but mostly South America. The two centres of diversity are eastern Brazil (origin of the genus) and the central Andes along the Peruvian and Bolivian border.



*Zephyranthes minima*  
drawing by Freda Cox

*Habranthus* and *Zephyranthes* are also indigenous to the Americas. Although less popular, I feel they deserve more attention because of their minimal growing requirements and a generous bloom time that extends from March through October. *Habranthus* and *Zephyranthes* are closely related species from the Amaryllidaceae family; both are commonly called rain lilies since they often come into bloom after it rains. One distinction between these species is that *Habranthus* flowers are zygomorphic and grow from sea level to 2,700 metres above sea level, while *Zephyranthes* flowers are actinomorphic and their range is higher; they are found up to 3,500 metres above

sea level. Rain lilies grow in a wide range of habitats ranging from xerophytic scrub, grasslands, conifer and oak forests, and tropical deciduous forests. In cultivation, rain lilies are just as happy growing in the ground as they are in a pot. Their short stature makes them a nice understory for flowering shrubs or roses.

Quite the contrary, one late summer bulb that needs quite a bit of garden space is *Amaryllis belladonna*. In California, gardeners commonly refer to them as Naked Ladies. Their six to eight-week blooming season is celebrated here and photos often light up Pinterest and Facebook pages with captions such as “The ladies are up!” In my garden, ‘the ladies’ are scattered throughout my hillside area, and they do indeed light up the late summer garden with their tall, regal and very fragrant flowers.

Naked Ladies are in the family Amaryllidaceae. *Amaryllis* and its hybrid relatives have relatively large bulbs (the size of a softball or larger), and grow with the top of the bulb at the surface of the soil. The flower stalk is about two feet tall (0.7 m) and emerges after the foliage has died away, hence the name Naked Ladies. Flowering may be stimulated by summer thundershowers or fires that have cleared away weeds and debris. In 2009, bulb enthusiast Mary Sue Ittner reported that after a fire in Northern California burned a restaurant to the ground and denuded the slope below it near her home, Naked Lady flower spikes appeared all over the hillside a few weeks later. Mary Sue assumed that these bulbs had naturalised because the slope is very steep and impossible to plant.

An additional late-summer and rapid naturaliser is *Crococsmia*; a genus in the Iridaceae family from tropical and eastern South Africa. Here in California, the orange tubular flowers are held on spikes and their nectar attracts hummingbirds like a magnet. Bred in 1879, *Crococsmia* × *crococsmiiflora*, also known as montbretia, is still grown today but many resulting hybrids are extinct. Their reputation as vigorous, weedy spreaders has not helped. Growing montbretias in pots resolves their spreading habit and if fed with plenty of organic matter their flower spikes are larger and showier.

Growing bulbs in pots definitely adds seasonal colour and bling to the garden. For instance, florist-grown cyclamen

hybrids with their long blooming period and showy flower spikes appear in the fall here in California. Their red, white and pink flowers with exotic leaf markings are especially prized during the Christmas holiday season. Unfortunately, these bulbs are often treated like annuals and unnecessarily thrown out after they finish blooming. Today, our horticultural awareness is keener after our prolonged drought, and savvy gardeners are purchasing more sustainable varieties of cyclamen. While attending the 2019 AGM, I experienced first-hand the impact and charm that cyclamen species have in their natural habitat on the rocky hillsides of Greece. I vowed to order a few of these hardy species upon returning home; hopefully these will flourish and naturalise in my garden too.

*Cyclamen graecum* is a deep pink autumn-flowering species that is native to southern Greece, the Greek islands, southern Turkey and Cyprus. The blooming period extends from September through November. The populations of *Cyclamen graecum* on the Mani peninsula in the Peloponnese region of southern Greece are notable for their large, deeply-coloured flowers and leaves. This is another species that also seems to burst into bloom after a fire.

*Cyclamen* is a genus in the Myriniaceae family now, though they were previously placed in the Primulaceae family; to this day, nomenclatural battles continue. There are approximately 20 species ranging from central and southern Europe, the Mediterranean region, western Asia and Somalia. Some cyclamen species flower in autumn before their leaves emerge, while others flower throughout the year.

In conclusion, the beauty and uniqueness of many species bulbs and their lesser-known hybrids add year-round joy, colour and interest to my garden. Personally, my goal is to inform people that mediterranean gardening is more than a limited palate of grey-greens when there are flowering plants available in the whole spectrum of colours and from so many floristic regions as well. I hope that this short list of seasonal geophytes inspires many of my mediterranean garden friends to grow more bulbs, explore their incredible diversity, and have more time to enjoy their garden and nature.

## VISITING A TRUE GARDEN OF REST

Christoph Wieschus

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Floriana hosts some of Malta's horticultural highlights such as the well-known Argotti Botanical Garden. Far less prominent is a site to the north of it, a beautiful spot for keen explorers and garden lovers. Crossing the threshold, you will find yourself on a terrace overlooking an extraordinary garden. Most dominant are mature cypresses (*Cupressus sempervirens*) about 200 years old. Additional structure and shelter are achieved by Judas trees (*Cercis siliquastrum*), Mt. Atlas mastic trees (*Pistacia atlantica*) and drooping false pepper trees (*Schinus molle*). From the parapet one may look down at Pieta Creek. The Msida Bastion was initially built in around 1635, during the period of the Knights Hospitallers of Saint John. Like most other such constructions, its purpose was military defence. Floriani, an Italian military architect involved in the works, later gave his name to the town.

In the early 1800s this part of the Msida Bastion became the first Christian non-Catholic (mainly Protestant) cemetery. Most of those buried here were British; however in 1829 it also became the final resting place of the Maltese Catholic Mikiel Anton Vassalli who had translated the New Testament into Maltese in opposition to the ideas of the Catholic Church. More than 600 graves have so far been detected. Sometimes they are discovered under unfortunate circumstances such as heavy storms like that of February 2019 when strong winds uprooted several cypresses, exposing further vaults in deeper layers.

Although it was reported in 1930 that the great majority of the inscriptions were damaged and indecipherable, it still took more than 50 years before restoration works began. In the meantime further damage had been caused by bombing in World War II. Today lawns and pathways make the entire area easily accessible. In spring arum lilies (*Zantedeschia aethiopica*), snake flowers (*Bulbine frutescens*), blue marguerites (*Felicia amelloides*) and Cape marguerites (*Osteospermum ecklonis*) are at their best. Later in the year they will be followed by the flowers of Cape leadworts (*Plumbago auriculata*), lantanas (*Lantana camara*) and Chinese hibiscuses (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*). Very

common because of its hardiness is the Natal plum (*Carissa macrocarpa*). Occasionally fundraising is done on certain days and pot plants can be acquired in return for donations. It was here that I managed to find the pretty but for some unknown reason extremely rare wax ivy (*Senecio macroglossus*).

Today Din l-Art Helwa (“this sweet land”) makes this location one of the best-kept public gardens on the island. Enthusiastic volunteers from this National Trust of Malta have invested much effort on this restoration project which in 2002 was awarded a Silver Medal by Europa Nostra. The opening hours of the garden are Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 9.30 to 12.00 and on each first Sunday of the month. If you come by car, I recommend a visit at the weekend since it is far less tricky to find a parking space. Every visitor is welcomed like a guest and kindly introduced to the interesting history of this serene place. It may sound spooky to visit a cemetery for horticultural purposes but this hidden gem is truly a unique garden of rest.



The Garden of Rest, Floriana  
drawing by Christoph Wieschus



# THE CAROB (*CERATONIA SILIQUA*)

Judy Thomas

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Last spring, while on a month-long trip to Turkey with my husband, I saw the most beautiful carob tree I've ever come across, growing in the ruins of Patara, near the Lycian League Theatre on the southern coast of Turkey.

Wikipedia describes *Ceratonia siliqua*, commonly known as the carob tree or St John's Bread, as a species of flowering shrub or tree in the pea family (Fabaceae). It is named for its large horn-like seedpods (from the Greek *keras*, horn, and the Latin *siliqua*, pea-pod). It is a broad-leaved evergreen with leaves that are evenly-pinnately compound and six to nine inches long. The plants are dense and multi-trunked, slow-growing and long-lived.

The carob consumed by humans is the mildly sweet, dried (sometimes roasted) pod, not the 'nuts' or seeds. Carob is used in powdered, chip or syrup form as an ingredient in cakes and cookies, in beverages and as a substitute for chocolate. The seeds are also known as locust beans and are the source of a thickening agent called locust bean gum. Pods are produced on female trees approximately every other year, if a male tree is planted in the vicinity. The ground pods are sweet and mealy and composed of about forty percent sugar.

Carob seeds were used to measure gold and gemstones, and eventually one seed – a carat – was standardised as equalling 0.2 grams. A pure gold Roman coin called a *solidus* weighed 24 carob seeds/carats, which is why we call pure gold '24-carat'.

Carob trees are mentioned in a number of religious traditions. The Talmudic parable "Honi and the Carob Tree" refers to the legendarily late fruiting age of carobs, indicating that a man who plants a carob does so for his descendants. In the New Testament Matthew reports that John the Baptist subsisted on "locusts and wild honey"; some have taken the locusts to mean carobs, a pleasant idea, but I'm afraid the English translators got it right, for the Greek word used, *akrides*, does mean specifically the insects. In Luke's telling of the parable of the Prodigal Son, the son desires to eat the pods he is feeding to the swine because

he is starving. Carob trees are likely famine crops because the carob is so resilient to harsh climate conditions and drought. During the Second World War it was common for the people of Malta and Greece – and probably other Mediterranean people too – to eat carobs as a supplement to rationed or severely limited food.

Most carobs I've seen prefer neglected sites. They are widely cultivated in the horticultural nursery industry as a wonderful tree for mediterranean and other temperate regions around the world – as their popularity in California and Hawaii shows. The plant develops a sculpted trunk and a tree form if “limbed up” as it matures. Otherwise it is used as a dense and large evergreen hedge. When not grown for legume harvests the plant is very drought-tolerant and may form part of a drought-tolerant landscape design for gardens, parks, and municipal and commercial landscapes. Their height for design drawings is about 30 feet, while their mature height is approximately 50 feet – far smaller than a California coast live oak, but with the same round-headed form. This makes them good trees to use in smaller gardens.



Leaves, flowers and seedpod of the carob

drawing by Derek Toms

Preferring full sun, the carob is, as I've noted, tolerant of drought, as well as of heat, poor soil, salt air and wind, and it has fire-resistant qualities. It is highly recommended for its dark green foliage and its attractive brown or grey bark with orange overtones. If planted in the fall and watered until the rains come, then again during the following summer, the carob should establish easily in the garden.

# A TREE FOR OUR TIME: THE CAROB

Simon Windeler

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With shifting rainfall patterns, climate change and other related dramatic events, the flora and fauna of many parts of the world are having a tough time. But although many plants, and trees in particular, are at risk, they are extraordinarily resilient and we humans have much to learn from them. I had thought of starting this article with a jocular address to trees to take heart in the face of the current challenges. However, I realised that this approach would be outrageously arrogant, given that it is human behaviour that is largely the cause of their suffering; I should be calling instead on my fellow humans to listen attentively to the flora and fauna. Naturally I'm sure that MGS members already do. So my exhortation is "Take heart, fellow gardeners, may your roots delve deep to find the nourishment your heads and hearts need, and may you continue to reach for the sun and the stars despite present difficulties".

The joy I get from planting trees and watching them grow is enormous on so many levels. Quite apart from their beauty and extraordinary longevity, trees play a crucial role in the ecosystem, so that recognition of the need to plant more trees in the face of the climate crisis is gaining significant attention worldwide. This is a source of hope. The more we can encourage people to attune themselves to and to assist the flora – as well as the fauna – around them, the more we, as a species, might be able to begin to right the wrongs of the Anthropocene.

Of course that is ambitious. But let us start small and let the idea grow. Seeing the first signs of life when a seed from a tree begins to germinate is entrancing. That a small seed has the potential to develop into a huge tree which might live and peacefully collaborate with its surroundings for decades or even centuries is a marvel to me. Unlike a human being who needs to be nurtured by his or her parents for many years (and even then might not turn out to be a well-adjusted organism), a seed manages to live and grow on its own, though admittedly with a suitable combination of water, sunlight and

soil. It seems to know what it needs, where to get it and how to interact with other organisms, as well as to have an instinctive understanding of the entire cosmos, including the sun and the moon.

Following the stages of a seed developing into a sapling teaches me patience and humility. The transition from a pot to the earth must be a momentous event for a tree; being the agent in such a process is certainly a most joyous experience for me. The preparatory steps themselves are journeys in time and space: deciding where a tree is likely to be happy involves envisaging, way into the future, its burgeoning shape and the possible evolution of a particular location; digging and preparing the soil to provide the newcomer with an optimal start in its new home involves a physical and sensory bonding with the Earth; and carrying a sapling to the spot where it will live for the rest of its life, getting it out of its pot and holding the fragile plant in my hands is a particularly quickening moment. For the last and only time its roots are up in the air, one might say head over heels... In the time frame of a tree the planting stage is an extremely fleeting process. Bedding those tender roots, sometimes thinner than a strand of hair, into the soil so that they can tenaciously dig their way down and then giving this new being a good soak is the final act in a thoroughly life-affirming ritual.



Three-year-old carob grown from seed  
drawing by Simon Windeler

Last autumn Michi and I had the life-affirming pleasure of planting our numerous saplings grown from seed – little more than 5cm in height, they gaze up bravely at the much taller grasses that surround them. With luck, one day they will be gazing down at little us... Not all seeds that we have collected from indigenous trees in our area have germinated, hence our glee when some do. (In *TMG 91* Michi wrote about the avocado stones that germinated by themselves in the compost and our thrill at seeing them begin to grow, but sadly, as we had anticipated, our soil is too dry for them and they haven't survived.) One mature tree in our garden, a carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*), has called on us to plant its seeds and we are responding enthusiastically. As its seeds are housed in nutritious pods, the prospect of growing beautiful trees which also produces yummy food is highly motivating. Since coming to live on the Greek island of Tilos I have rapidly grown to love carob trees, and our success rate in germinating their seeds has improved significantly.

Known by various names such as St John's Bread, locust bean, goat's horn and in Greek χαρουπιά (haroupia), carob trees have a great deal to offer. Native to the Mediterranean and the Middle East, they have been grown in these regions for millennia and are tough evergreen trees that can reach a height of 15 metres, able to cope with rocky soil. Not only do they provide sanctuary for birds and insects as well as deep shade for livestock but the female trees also provide nutritious food in the form of their elongated dark brown bean pods. Rich in sugars (up to 50%), protein (up to 5%) and beneficial fibre, the pods also contain potassium, calcium and phosphorus, as well as magnesium, iron and vitamins A, B, B2, B3, B6, C and E.

As the seeds are very hard, we scarify them first, let them soak in recently boiled water and then keep them moist until they germinate, all of which might take a week to ten days, then plant them in pots.

Once the tiny seedlings are about 5cm tall with healthy leaves and roots about three times as long, we plant them out so that these taproots can grow. The most energetic saplings grow about 60cm per year. Early on they develop strong, sturdy trunks and branches which are able to withstand fierce winds.

But they do need to be protected from predators. Because wild rabbits are plentiful in our area and will eat almost anything, we erect 50cm-high fencelets around each plant. Large locusts can also devour a whole sapling, but luckily not too many of them have come our way. Surprisingly, towards the end of summer when alternative food sources become scarce, rock mice will eat the bark of carob trees. This happened twice to a mature male tree in our garden and the nibbled branches died; happily after severe pruning the tree has recovered and we now try to protect it by placing thorny bushes around the trunk in late summer.

The trees become characters in a relatively short time and always look the picture of good health. The pods they produce are wonderful: you can eat them as they are after they fall from the tree but they are easy to store for months without refrigeration. Admittedly you need strong teeth to eat them raw and you have to chew them with care because of the extremely hard seeds, But just one pod provides quite an energy boost. Some of the local people on this island either eat them raw or feed them to their livestock, but it doesn't seem that carob pods are held in particularly high regard. As vegetarians, pulses are a valued part of our diet and carob trees are legumes; thus, having such wholesome pods to hand, we have begun experimenting with other ways of using them.

Apart from enjoying raw pods, we make a carob paste which we then use to bake breads, biscuits and rusks. We wash and dry the pods then break them up and remove all the seeds – a process called kibbling. Then we leave them to soak in water for a day or two before cooking them slowly; to save energy we bring the water to the boil, then switch off the heat and let them stew, repeating this numerous times in the course of a day or two until the chunks are soft enough to purée. Puréed carob has a slightly astringent taste, but this is lost when it is mixed with oil or butter, and no doubt there are other ways this paste could be used. Another approach, which we haven't tried, is to roast the pods and then grind them into a powder.

A tree that gives us such nutritious food so generously, and which asks for little from its natural habitat is a wonder

in my eyes. Given the need for sustainable sources of food, along with the need to grow more trees, the carob deserves a lot more appreciation and could well be considered a tree for our time.



# LITHOPS CULTIVATION

Andrew Sloan

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I would like to share my experience of growing lithops, commonly called “living stones”, for the last two years. The name lithops is derived from the Greek word *lithos* (stone) and *opsis* (appearance) and was given to these plants on account of their similarity in colour and appearance to the stones and pebbles around them in their natural habitat. The plants thus blend in among the stones as a means of protection since grazing animals, which would otherwise eat them in periods of drought to obtain moisture, usually overlook them.

The genus *Lithops* belongs to the Aizoaceae family of plants better known as Mesembryanthema. *Lithops* species are widely distributed in South Africa and Namibia, usually in drier to very arid desert regions with low annual rainfall of 50-200 mm. There are 36 species and numerous subspecies amounting to 145 varieties as well as many cultivars. Within many of the same species there is a marked variation in the patterning on the leaves and even the colours, which are generally mottled brown, green or grey. Lithops could not survive in many areas were it not for their capacity to store water. The body of the plant is divided into two succulent leaves fused together in the shape of an inverted cone, with a central fissure dividing the two leaves and a taproot joined at the base. The leaves are thick enough to store enough water for the plants to survive without rain for months. The bodies usually divide creating a clump.

The two most important elements in growing lithops are to provide a well-lit location and a correct watering regime where the plants are watered thoroughly at the beginning of the spring and autumn growing seasons and left dry in winter and summer. Lithops need a lot of sunlight, without which they become elongated. Many collectors in Northern Europe grow them in greenhouses which they ventilate in the summer and heat and light in the winter. For a small collection a south-facing window sill is ideal. I have my plants in southern Spain inside an open, tall garage facing south-east so that they receive sunshine all morning and a shaded, bright light in the afternoon. Because

they are under a roof they do not receive any rain, so I can control the watering regime. Temperatures do not generally go beneath zero here, which lithops would not tolerate, so it is a good climate for growing them outside provided they are protected from winter rain.



*Lithops olivacea* has lovely green markings  
drawing by Kate Marcelin-Rice

### **Winter**

I am writing this in the winter which is a time when the outer leaves shrivel and new leaves appear, with the water inside the old leaves being transferred to the new leaves. It is fascinating to see this take place. In their natural environment there is no rain at this time of year, so no watering is required. The soil should remain bone-dry no matter how shrivelled the plants become.

### **Spring**

After their dry winter rest the old leaves are reduced to thin papery shells which can eventually be removed with care from around the plant. It is spring by the time the plants reach this stage (April for me) and they should now be watered thoroughly a few times, saturating the pots but letting them dry between each watering. The leaves will plump up, allowing the plants to get through the hot summer with no or minimal watering.

### **Summer**

During the summer months lithops become dormant. Regular watering during this period would cause them to rot and turn

into mush. If a marked shrivelling occurs during this time, it is safe to water lightly in order to restore the firm appearance of the plant. Never water deeply when the plants are dormant. When in doubt do not water. These are among the most drought-tolerant plants on earth.

### **Autumn**

The second growing season is the autumn. When the temperatures begin to drop the plants wake up from their summer dormancy. Water again thoroughly several times; this gives the plants energy to flower. The fissure between the leaves begins to separate and a bud will force its way up leading to a lovely, relatively large white or yellow flower which opens up in the afternoon for one to two weeks. Lithops must usually be three years old before they begin flowering. The seed capsules of lithops, like those of other mesembs, are hydrochastic: they open only when they become wet. This is a protective seed-saving mechanism that allows seeds to be exposed and washed out only during rainy weather but can be used in cultivation to access the seeds.

The exact timing of the change in seasons is difficult to define. In Southern Spain I apply the winter no watering rule when minimum temperatures drop below 10 °C, and the summer no watering regime when night-time temperatures are over 22 °C and/or daytime temperatures over 30 °C.

### **Seed germination**

I found my first lithops plants (*Lithops karasmontana*) at a local nursery garden two years ago, inspired by seeing them in Robin Frandsen's excellent book *Succulents of Southern Africa*. Since then I have grown different varieties from seed sourced at ozlithops.com (Australia) and mesagarden.com (USA), both reliable sources. Germination of lithops seeds is best done in spring when temperatures are above 20 °C using the plastic-bag method commonly used for all succulents. I sterilise my mix of 70% pumice and 30% cactus potting soil in a microwave or oven, let it cool and put it in some seedling pots, scatter the lithops seeds on top and lightly cover with some more sterilised river sand or gravel which will provide support for the seedlings after germination. I soak the pots in a cat litter

tray (naturally empty of cat litter) to water from beneath so as to not disturb the seeds and after draining off the excess water put them inside a clear plastic bag which I close and place in a light but not sunny spot. Healthy seeds germinate fairly quickly and the bag can be removed. The small seedlings should continue to be watered from beneath on a regular basis. The soil mix should not dry out completely but should not be soaking wet all the time as this can cause rot. I have had such a good germination rate from my last bunch of seeds from ozlithops that I currently have about 100 seedlings of six different species, of course far too many for my own needs but useful credit for plant-swapping when they are big enough.

After one year the plants should be ready to be transplanted, best done in the autumn or spring. Lithops plants grow in a very poor, rocky soil in Southern Africa so it is best to use very little organic material. I use pots 10cm deep to allow room for the taproots with a mix of 90% pumice and 10% cactus potting soil. Alternatives to pumice include gravel, coarse sand, granite or crushed brick but it is important to maintain the high percentage of inorganic material.

I am getting a lot of pleasure from growing lithops and watching their seasonal changes. When I show visitors around our succulent garden the lithops plants attract a lot of attention, especially in the large pot we have on our covered south-facing terrace where I have placed three different lithops as well as other “living stone” plants like *Pleiospilos* and *Aloinopsis* with real stones and pebbles. Visitors often have to touch the plants and stones to find out which is which. Facebook has a group called “Love lithops” which, apart from lots of photos from collectors all over the world, has some good information on growing lithops in the files section at the top. There are some very good sites on the web as well, my favourite being [www.lithops.info](http://www.lithops.info).

A final summary: lots of sunlight and developing the seasonal watering regime which mimics their natural environment is the best way to get good results.

For photographs of these plants see the MGS website ([www.mediterraneangardensociety.org/journal-100.html](http://www.mediterraneangardensociety.org/journal-100.html)).

## WHAT'S IN A NAME: *SCILLA PERUVIANA*

Seán O'Hara

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*Scilla peruviana* is a common bulb here in California, often shared among gardeners because of its easiness of cultivation and its tendency to multiply and self-seed. I've met many gardeners who have grown it for years but had no idea what it actually was. Fully adapted to the mediterranean climate, during the dry season it goes completely dormant and is often forgotten about until a new set of leaves emerge with the fall rains. Typically, cultivated plants have rich blue flowers, although a pure white form is often sold. This variant can produce white seedlings but more often – especially if blue plants are close at hand – it 'hybridises', yielding forms of various colours from pale blue to dark blue and even shades of lavender. Sometimes there are different hues on the petals, the stamens and the conspicuous pistils, making for a multiplicity of colour arrangements.

This is exactly what I encountered years ago when I was hired to consult on a very old property in the Berkeley Hills of California's San Francisco Bay Area. These bulbs had seeded themselves around much of the large garden during many years of neglect (i.e. there was no one to remove the numerous seedheads which formed after flowering). I still have a small selection of different types that I've grown ever since. Because each 10 to 12-inch flower spike can produce as many as 150 individual flowers, *Scilla peruviana* makes a month-long display and can also produce a copious amount of seed.

The fact that it does so well under our local mediterranean-climate conditions is no surprise. Despite its botanical name, *Scilla peruviana* is native to countries ranging from Tunisia to Morocco, Portugal, southern Spain and Italy. In this latter country it has become increasingly rare, even though there is evidence that it may have been cultivated in gardens in ancient Sicily. Naturalisation has occurred in other parts of the Mediterranean and indeed the world. The plant has become so common in Cuba that many now call it the 'Cuban Lily' and many new cultivars of the species bear Caribbean-inspired names. Clearly *Scilla peruviana* is native to the Mediterranean,

so how could it possibly have ended up with a name honouring Peru?

I could begin the story along the lines of “Munichoven, Clusius and Linnaeus walked into a bar...”.

More seriously, I was researching the commonly told story recounting that bulbs of this plant found their way to northern Europe aboard a ship named ‘The Peru’ – this story lacks detail and is often repeated almost verbatim, which always makes me suspicious. During my research I came across the following remark by Edward Augustus Bowles (1865-1954) in his book *My Garden in Summer*:

“They no more came from Peru than the pretended Charley’s Aunt did from Brazil, and they are plentiful as wild plants in Spain. It has been said that a ship named The Peru carried some bulbs of the plant, and from it they got their name, but I have not been able to hunt down this tale. Clusius seems to be chiefly responsible for the error as to its native country, for he records that it was brought from Peru and grown and flowered by Everard Munichoven, who made a drawing of it, a copy of which was sent to Clusius in 1592, and Linnaeus appears to have been misled by this statement, and to have saddled it for ever with its lying specific name. But Parkinson knew it came from Spain, and tells how one Guillaume Boel sent him bulbs from Spain in 1607... he tells us: ‘This hath been formerly named Eriophorus Peruanus and Hyacinthus Stellatus Peruanus, being thought to have grown in Peru, a Province of the West Indies: but he that gave that name first unto it, eyther knew not his naturall place, or willingly imposed that name to conceal it or to make it the better esteemed, but I had rather give the name agreeing most fitly unto it, and call it, as it is indeede, Hyacinthus Stellatus Boeticus, the Spanish Starry Hyacinth.’ Well done, old Parkinson – you have given Clusius and his friends a nice rap over the knuckles.”

Well, that was fun and I know what you’re thinking: Charles de l’Écluse (1526-1609), a.k.a Clusius, was born 180 years before Linnaeus (1707-1778). (You *were* thinking that, right?)

A similar story is provided in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, vol. 18, 1803: "Linnaeus might have been induced to give the specific title of *peruviana*, on the authority of Clusius, who received it with notice of its coming from Peru out of the garden of Everard Munichoven, a botanical dilettante of the day, but who certainly was mistaken in supposing it to have been brought from the above country, and has led both his friend, and through him Linnaeus, into error." So Linnaeus' mistake was to assume that the information was correct before placing this species into the genus *Scilla*.



*Hyacinthus Stellatus Peruanus*  
from Clusius, 1592

Confusion has followed this misstep ever since, even to the point of the following erroneous statement I found on a current nursery website: "The blue Peruvian *Scilla* flowering bulb plant was gathered by early Spanish explorers in Peru and widely established and naturalized throughout Europe." And I have still not found any further information about the ship named 'The Peru' – it makes one wonder why such a tale came to be concocted.

Back to today... Recent DNA sequencing has inspired a proposed reorganisation of the genus *Scilla*. *S. peruviana* and

a handful of related species are now seen to have a distinct branch in the evolutionary tree and are henceforth to be placed in the genus *Oncostema*. Thus instead of *Scilla peruviana* L. 1753 (Linnaeus and his publication date), our featured plant would ultimately be known as *Oncostema peruviana* (L.) Speta 1987 (renaming of a Linnaean binomial by Franz Speta, 1987). But why not change the reference to Peru? Unfortunately, the laws of botanical binomial names since 1753 state that once a name has been published, unless an earlier published name is found, this name must remain regardless of how inappropriate or incorrect it may be.

Last year I happened to walk by a florist's shop where the owner was fussing over a table of plants outside her door. I eyed some potted dark blue specimens of *Scilla peruviana* in bloom. I commented that I'd never seen these offered at a florist's before. Thinking that I did not know the plant, she explained carefully, "Its name is *Scilla peruviana* but it's not actually native to Peru. It is commonly called Cuban Lily because that is where it comes from."

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# A NEW BIOLOGICAL SYSTEM – A NEW HOPE

Ángel Pérez Sánchez

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I like to walk near the dry, rocky riverbeds of the Marina Alta on the northern Costa Blanca in Spain. These are landscapes dominated by boulders, natural terraces and potholes, and bordered by exuberant reedbeds and patches of oleander bushes. My walks are leisurely, permitting me to be attentive to details, observing forms of life which are very important for me. I look for small puddles or cracks filled with water, since they usually attract life, and it is easier to detect in them new species to be admired.

The more I investigate our local natural environment, the more I am amazed by the large number of species growing in the riverbeds. These are plants and animals which originated in distant places and which – thanks to human activity – have arrived here, adjusted to this new climate and spread over their new territory. They are conquerors, or rather invaders.

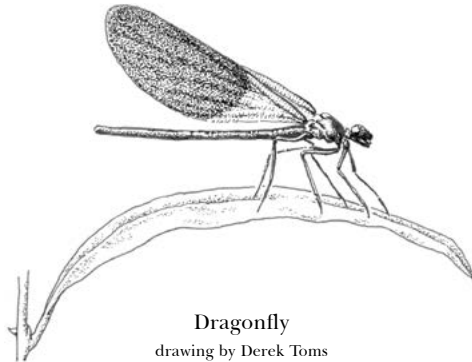
There is much discussion about exotic invasive species, and with good reason, now that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) considers them to be the second world-wide cause of loss of biodiversity. Governments have taken measures against them for a long time, using many resources to eradicate them and making people aware of the importance of not promoting their expansion. Parallel to governments, civil society is increasingly joining the battle against exotic invasive species. I am one of them. From my position at the Albarda Garden I try to make people aware of the serious problems caused, and the consequences we shall suffer by being so negligent.

Let us return to the dry riverbed. Insects are one of my favourite groups of living beings. They have fascinated me for as long as I can remember, and they are those creatures whose behaviour I observe most fervently. In 2010 I noticed with great interest that a Spanish bank was sponsoring a project for volunteers to investigate the dramatic decline of insects of the Odonata order, i.e. dragonflies and damselflies, in wetlands and their hunting zones; in fact the European authorities had

already announced a decrease in these insects as early as the 1980s (Tol and Verdonk, 1988). I had been aware of this for years and worried about not seeing those majestic insects in the dry riverbeds and ravines where I enjoy walking. But it was one of those things which I became used to without giving it the necessary attention.

On one of my walks in spring 2015 I noticed an unusually high number of members of the Odonata order in the bed of the River Girona in the Marina Alta, near the puddles which the locals call “Els tolls” (the puddles). I admired them simply for my own pleasure throughout that year without further investigation or study.

In 2016 a period of drought lasting nearly six years ended with more rain than usual, which caused an explosion of life during that spring, with a huge number of Odonata members. I could hardly believe it: they were everywhere. In the Albarda Garden, the spectacular Mediterranean garden where I work, we counted ten different species. During the past few years a relatively large population of dragonflies and damselflies has established itself in the puddles and pools of the riverbeds, which makes me enjoy my walks there even more. But what has caused this sudden increase in the numbers of these insects?



Dragonfly  
drawing by Derek Toms

I began to investigate this phenomenon to satisfy my curiosity. Among many variable factors my attention was drawn to one in particular. In 2012 the first Asian tiger mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*) was discovered in the Marina Alta, where its

population continued to grow until in 2014 it was recognised as an important pest. Hospitals and medical centres were close to collapsing when so many patients who had been bitten by the tiger mosquito appeared for treatment. This exotic invasive species is very dangerous as it transmits various diseases to humans. Moreover it is practically impossible to eradicate it once it has settled in an area. Both the larvae and the adult insects of the Odonata order feed on the tiger mosquito. Is it possible that this new food supply has caused such an increase in dragonflies?

Theory tells us that exotic invasive species are harmful because the ecosystem is not capable of absorbing and adding them to the food chain. When such a species enters the food chain, it disturbs the equilibrium between predator and prey, but when it succeeds in stabilising itself the exotic species forms part of a new ecosystem. By having a huge supply of prey (the tiger mosquito), the predator population (insects of the Odonata order) has grown exponentially. This will surely put the native mosquito, already battered by the invader, under a further disadvantage.

In the near future this predator-prey system will reach a new balance, reducing the population of both to a normalised limit in the rural and woodland areas where the ecosystems are not drowned by insecticides. Nature is equilibrium, and when disturbed it always strives to reach this balance again in any possible way. Human activities often disturb the status quo and cause unexpected reactions, leading to a new equilibrium. In most cases these processes are slow, such as the reappearance of vegetation after a fire in a Mediterranean forest. On the other hand, we humans typically lack patience and always want to accelerate processes, which certainly leads to a greater disequilibrium. Now that the damage has occurred and the tiger mosquito is here, we have to follow only good habits and avoid encouraging it to live in our houses; in nature there are already predators that deal with it, namely our majestic dragonflies and damselflies.

*Translated from the Spanish by Edith Haeuser*

# DISCOVERING WILD FLOWERS IN CORFU

Clare Doig

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I have been a member of the MGS for a few years now, courtesy of a subscription as a birthday present from my daughter. My husband and I have a house and land (2500 square metres) in the north of Corfu, on the edge of the village of Acharavi. Over the last five years we have been creating a low-maintenance, low-water garden around our house.

Although I am a gardener and have always been interested in plants, my first love is wild flowers. Even as a child growing up in Yorkshire I knew where to find each seasonal plant as the time of year came around: snowdrops in the hedgerow, white violets in the woods, lady's smock in the boggy fields, wild daffodils in the dales of the North Yorkshire moors and cowslips in the chalky fields near our house. I think that even now, 50 years on, I could still take you to the exact places where I first saw these plants, though some of them may no longer be there because of changes in their surroundings. I get enormous pleasure from seeing plants growing, wild and beautiful, in their native habitats, especially when they are new to me or are rare specimens.

Thus coming to Corfu for the first time about 15 years ago was an eye-opener for me as an (up until then) British gardener only. I already knew, of course, that many of our garden plants originated in the Mediterranean, but actually to see them pushing up through the ground in my own olive grove was beyond exciting. In Scotland where I have been working most recently, gardeners would kill to have *Acanthus spinosus* springing up unbidden on their banks and braes... Imagine my excitement – which, as fellow gardeners, you probably can – when I found yellow horned poppies (*Glaucium flavum*) on the sandy trackside along our local beach, bee orchids (*Ophrys* spp.) in the olive groves above the village, clumps of scented *Narcissus tazetta* in the boggy fields behind the dunes, autumn crocus (*Colchicum*) and cornflowers (*Cyanus segetum*, formerly *Centaurea cyanus*) in the rough grass of the hills, and *Phlomis fruticosa*, (another Scottish garden must-have), larkspur (*Consolida orientalis*), various

anemones, love-in-a-mist, (*Nigella damascena*) and *Cistus creticus* growing wild on our own land. Not to mention many other plants, shrubs and trees which I didn't previously know and have now seen in their wild and cultivated forms.



*Galanthus reginae-olgae*  
drawing by Clare Doig

Among some of my favourite finds and abiding memories was discovering the large autumn snowdrop (*Galanthus reginae-olgae*) among the ivy and shade-loving plants under the trees at the edge of a road while out for a walk. These snowdrops are much bigger than our dainty UK ones and have a very nice, quite strong, perfume. This was also a memorable walk because a three-legged goat appeared out of the woods and followed us down the road for a while.

Finding the bee orchids mentioned above was another red-letter day as they were something I had hoped to find in the wild since childhood. They were among flower-filled grasses around a disused well at the edge of an olive grove in the hills above the village. We found both the pink one with a brown "bee", which looks a little like a horseshoe and is consequently called *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*, and the white form of *Ophrys fuciflora* subsp.

*bornmuelleri* with bigger, showier petals. My daughter spotted them first, and we all crouched down to get a proper look and photograph them for identification later, then as we carried on down the footpath we saw dozens more.

My first sight of a pomegranate tree in bloom with its amazingly bright orange frilled flowers and the tiny pomegranates behind them was another exciting moment – I had no idea what it was, as it leant over a wall by the traffic lights, and I'm afraid that I held up the traffic gazing at it.

Then there was the day when we found, for the first time, the scented white sea daffodil (*Pancratium maritimum*) in the sand dunes. Gerald Durrell devotes a whole chapter to these unusual bulbs in his book *My Family and Other Animals*, describing a boat trip he and his family took to go and see, or should I say experience, them. With several large, white, highly-scented trumpet-shaped flowers on each stalk (though only one or two are open at a time) they are a striking sight, but they are equally striking, I think, in the autumn when their thick strap-like leaves turn blueish and the fat seedheads split open to let the large, three-cornered, shiny black seeds fall into the sand. Apparently these plants are endangered in some places because of over-picking, but here I am pleased to report that they spread all the way along a two-mile stretch of dunes.

Another of my favourites is the early summer wild gladiolus (*Gladiolus italicus*) which appears on fallow land around the villages. It is very graceful and on undisturbed land seems to spread easily, creating a field full of magenta-pink spires, so beautifully simple. I am not a fan of hybrid gladioli – they are too showy and stiff for me.

From the rocky, sea-drenched slopes of the coast comes the white form of the star-like *Romulea bulbocodium* which dots the short, goat-cropped grass with its low, yellow-veined petals and long, narrow, twisting leaves. Probably due to the saltiness the grass is a dark, dark green, contrasting beautifully with the pure white and golden yellow of the romulea.

A strange find in a corner of our land was a giant orchid (*Himantoglossum robertianum*, formerly *Barlia robertiana*). Not very pretty, it has brownish, purplish flowers in a cylindrical spike. Individually the flowers look like a peculiar-shaped person with big ears, long arms and short legs.



*Orlaya grandiflora*

drawing by Clare Doig

I adore the pretty white *Orlaya grandiflora* (like a delicate sort of cow parsley) which adorns the grass under our olive trees in early summer. It is so dainty with its ruff of larger petals around the edge of each flower head, a little like a lace-cap hydrangea.

On my way down the lane to the shops there is a very beautiful *Convolvulus lanuginosus* growing out across the tarmac. It spreads its sprawling stalks and silver grey leaves out as far as it dares and each morning shows off with pale pink, silken flowers.

My grandson was captivated by the giant dandelion-clock seedheads of *Tragopogon hybridus* which adorn the banks and field edges in late spring. Several inches across and perfectly spherical, they catch the sunlight within their globes for a day or two, then the seeds blow away. The strange flowers, which only last a day, are small, looking a bit like a purple chicory flower but with long green sepals between each petal giving it a spiky appearance.

Each year, after the Christmas treat of citrus trees in fruit, glowing with their own light on misty mornings, I look forward

to seeing the little blue ground iris (*Iris unguicularis* subsp. *cretensis*) which grows abundantly here on grassy banks and under the overhanging trees, brightening our spirits with its fresh, pale blue petals like the snowdrops do in Britain.

In Corfu Town (and I have also found these on sea cliffs) I love to see the caper plants (*Capparis spinosa*) growing out of the walls of the Fort with their pretty, fresh green rounded leaves and showy white-petalled flowers sporting huge bunches of long yellow/pink stamens.

Something truly beautiful and humble is the allium I discovered growing in a large, damp, grassy area behind the beach. It is a charming ball of little pink bells, looking eminently suitable for a small bridesmaid's bouquet. Each bell, with yellow stamens and a green centre, is held loosely but together they make up a sphere. The white species, *Allium subhirsutum*, grows on our land, but despite its pretty dark brown anthers it is not as charming as the pink *A. roseum*.

There are an uncountable number of "vetches" here, most of which are in fact not vetches at all though most are in the Fabaceae family. One of my favourites grows on the rocky land by the sea, along with the romulea. It is called *Tetragonolobus purpureus* and in the spring forms a large mat of leaves which is then covered with dark red pea-like flowers with even darker central petals, almost black. It is very colourful and striking. Another favourite is *Bituminaria bituminosa*, syn. *Psoralea bituminosa*, a tall, roadside "vetch" with attractive grey-green leaves held in threes, and soft pale mauve heads held up among the summer grasses. If you crush the leaves they smell strongly of tar or bitumen – hence the name.

I could go on for hours... I haven't touched on all the wonderful vetches, echiums, helianthemums, hypericums, campanulas and many others. Here is a paradise for anyone who is a plant lover.



# MY YEAR WITHOUT A GARDEN

Julie Kinney

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It never entered my head when I decided to downsize after losing my husband that I would spend a year without a garden of my own. Originally it was to be a transition to an existing house followed by a renovation of whatever existed there in the way of a garden but I was fussy and couldn't find something that sang to me. The thought came into my head to build. We had built our last home together as an adventure after always renovating others. Of course I had to find somewhere within the perimeter of where I wanted to be in the wine-growing Margaret River region where we have lived for the past 25 years. I chanced upon a new development on the edge of town with a few plots directly opposite pristine bushland along a brook that was designated public open space and with a lovely walkway along the edge. As I explored, I ran into friendly walkers who all sang the praises of this little spot and I was sold on it, especially when there was a corner block just waiting for me to create a garden. More importantly, the bush was so pretty that it occurred to me that I could just enjoy it and not bother to do much on my side but, hey, that's not how I enjoy gardening. I like action, albeit sometimes too much.

And so the process began. At this stage I was still in my own garden so I organised my mediterranean gardening group to have a cuttings day to preserve as many species as possible that were in my collection and rarely seen in our nurseries with their diminishing selections. Then my pots went out to various caring friends – and I am not talking of just my potted collection but of all the potting on I had done for the move. At this stage I had a house plan but only a few thoughts as to garden design. Meanwhile I was comfortably distracted by going off on pre-planned tours to lead groups through gardens further afield. Another story, another time.

Six months on and the foundations of the house have just been laid. It has been frustrating waiting for the council to approve my plans and with Christmas looming the builders were gearing down. How could I be thinking of gardens? But

of course I am. In the interim I have been in a friend's holiday house with the most agapanthus you could ever cram in a garden. They wanted easy care and that's what they have. Right now they are in full bloom with a spreading jacaranda tree (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*) in the background, so the garden is a vision of blue and white with a touch of the brightest yellow from a perennial *Coreopsis* species. Yet again I am rethinking... I can't help myself and earlier in the cooler spring I moved a few of the aggies around in an effort to thin them and spread mulch thickly so I like to think I have contributed to this summer spectacular. Not the right time to be replanting but it was the right moment for someone used to having grubby hands daily.

My old garden was full of drought-tolerant plants which delighted me and I will go down this path again while trying to keep in mind fire-retardant qualities. Of course there were losses along the way but I thought I had my selection quite well honed. Summer-dry bulbs are a must. They stretch the flowering season so far.

I give below a condensed list of what flowered throughout the year here. I am not including all the jonquils, daffodils and belladonnas that certainly fill the garden joyfully.

In May: *Spiloxene minuta*, a delicate edging plant which lights up the bare dry ground before the rain begins

In June: *Iris unguicularis* of varied colours. It grows on neglected sites around the countryside here.

In July: *Ranunculus cortusifolius* – a wow factor which has done possibly too well for me. Needs watching but not too closely.

In August: *Scilla peruviana* and *S. hyacinthoides*. I love the blue and white effect they give.

In September: *Spiloxene capensis*, white only, and deep burgundy *Sparaxis*. Both these plants always create interest.

Ixias appear in every month in their various colours which I like to keep separate for better impact. Mine were mainly collected in the wild down around here. They are slowly naturalising.

Autumn colour is important to me and as I won't have that in the bushland I shall need a good contrast, top of my list

being a *Cotinus* species, a plant just being recognised here for its drought tolerance and performance. Thankfully the local nurseries are now tracking it down. I'll go for *Lagerstroemia* too, with a focus on smaller species. Our council has planted Spotted Gum (*Corymbia maculata*) on my verge. These are huge trees and I have requested the council to remove them in order to protect my gutters, and to plant something more appropriate for the size of these plots. I am still awaiting an answer.

During this time when I don't have my own garden I have been on a few road trips during the spring, meeting people at my destinations but travelling on my own, selfishly, so as not to be distracted from the views, the botanical treasures and some special memories. We have an incredible diversity of wild flowers in this south-west corner but going further into our wheat belt I was able to stretch my knowledge as plant life became sparser and trees smaller. Our Western Australian road verges are full of tiny treasures; one plant which was in profusion at the time was bright blue *Lechenaultia biloba*, a groundcover which lights up the bush when in flower. Even where I stayed on a wheat farm with family our daily walks had us almost tiptoeing so as not to squash the plant life. Tiny heath-like mounds with minute flowers were like precious jewels in our infertile ancient soils. Smaller multi-stemmed eucalypt trees with ghostly mottled trunks were the norm out here, so different from the towering timber trees in my area, for example *E. marginata*, *E. diversicolor* and *Corymbia calophylla* (the three main ones). The leaves were often muted blueish tones that I wanted to pick for decorating purposes. There were Gumnuts too, a different form, a collector's dream except that we don't collect our flora here – we just look and photograph.

Wild flowers aside, I also visited Manjimup in an area known as Southern Forests, which is fast becoming the food bowl of our south-west area. Our first stop was a historic abandoned garden on a farm. The old house was sadly an irreparably crumbling wreck but the trees, oh how wonderful they were. The property has been handed on to a new generation who are keen to create a budget to restore and revive what trees they can and wanted some advice, which is why we had been invited to visit. This trip had been about two years in the planning as we (four of us) all

tried to link our busy lives together. The soil of the area is a rich chocolate loam that I am so envious of, working as I do with my light coastal soil.

Later we visited another well-kept mature garden, again on a big commercial horticultural holding that specialised in truffles, a new booming industry in the area. Here, however, the owners had already allocated a budget to care for the place despite the homestead not being occupied by the family. Some of these trees had been allowed enough space to show their true, magnificent shapes, especially the oak which we thought might have been a Turkey Oak (*Quercus cerris*). Both these gardens went back to the earliest settlers of the region. We also had an impromptu tour of an avocado farm which grew much more than avocados (another recent crop in this region where hundreds of hectares are being planted). We tested petals off the feijoas as they are being considered for inclusion in salads. There were neatly espaliered rows of pears and apples, some netted to protect them from our abundant birdlife which can decimate a crop in no time. These trees looked prolific with their young fruit forming. Apples were once the backbone of the region. Even seeing the avocado packing shed was an education – without the backpacker labour force the fruit would never make it to the market. Needless to say, we drove off with a huge tray of avocados to share. Such generous people around here...

Next day we went to a plant collector's garden on a farm where an enormous bull sat on top of a farm dam wall watching the world go by. We were totally entranced at the entrance by the large central bed of a roundabout filled with *Romneya coulteri* in spectacular full flower. It was an amazing sight: the plant had nothing to compete with and overwhelm as it normally does. However that was a bonus: what we had come to see was the European wood planted by the owner for her Scottish husband so that he would feel 'at home'. Densely planted, it was the sort of wood one might experience in the northern hemisphere – if there had been bluebells underneath I might have forgotten where I was. It included species such as spruce and larch which we very rarely see here in Western Australia. We pushed low branches aside and tramped through these woods, exploring, before meeting up with the owner who enlightened us by

naming the more unusual species. Copper beeches planted in profusion were just stunning. Out in the open in this area they burn and shrivel, so this is the perfect environment for them to thrive. Frosts are common here in winter. unlike in my mediterranean locale less than two hours' drive away. These trees were on average less than twenty years old with some exceptions from the grandparents' days. The garden proper was full of cool-climate treasures too, setting my heart beating a few times, but then as is a gardener's wont we saw a large new bed full of the mediterranean plants with which I am so very comfortable. This was an experimental area, we were told, and I suspect many of the plants won't survive the cold winter, let alone the much higher summer temperatures usually experienced in this area.



*Romneya coulteri*

drawing by Christine Cresswell

I calculated that I had been away from home about 30 hours on this trip and felt so saturated with history and plants and beauty that I doubt I could have taken anything more in. And I haven't mentioned all the snakes I have seen this spring

on my travels. I have never ever been so close to so many. All poisonous of course.

Less than a couple of weeks later I made another trip to the more northern wheat belt for a family gathering and the countryside was different again, but this time we were on the alert for bushfires, constantly watching the skies for telltale smoke spirals. Summer was coming. Sadly since I began to write this article so much of our country has burned and gardeners among many others have lost a lifetime's work.

I am visiting many of my friends' gardens and spending time walking and talking my way through them, both learning and giving advice. Sharing knowledge is such an essential part of gardening and friendship.

My year isn't up yet and I have hopes that I will be planting in my new garden within that time frame. While it is frustrating, I have enjoyed the freedom from my intense plantings to explore further afield in my own state. I still have another road trip planned around the south-east coast to Esperance through some national park areas that will be fascinating. This time, however, I'll be sharing the car with some fellow aficionados.

I still haven't made a plan for my new garden but many of the same thoughts keep floating around so I think that by the time I have a roof over my head I shall have a good idea of what I want to do.

# WHAT TO PLANT?

Geoff Crowhurst

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I live and garden in Melbourne, not far from where our current President, Caroline Davies, gardens with pots – a quite Mediterranean thing to do. Melbourne’s climate used to be described as temperate, but with climate change we are getting less rain in winter and higher summer temperatures. The most difficult thing to cope with is variability: rainfall is very sporadic, and the few decent falls of rain can come at any time of year, though the benefit of good summer rain is often lost through rapid evaporation. In summer plants have to cope with sudden changes in temperature. Only yesterday (in late spring) we had a 40 degree day with strong, dry north winds, but by evening there was a cool change and the temperature had dropped to 20 degrees.

With my single-front Victorian terrace home I have a very small front garden, but more room at the back. I am not into coddling plants, though the city water supply, when not subject to drought restrictions, is good. I try to use as little water as possible, but have a few plants such as clematis growing in large plastic pots with their bottoms cut out. These plants take the heat well and can go a few days without watering even if it is very hot. I value some plants because they are particularly trouble-free and manage to cope with Melbourne’s climate remarkably well.

Many years ago I noticed nurseries promoting dwarf cultivars of bougainvillea developed in Queensland, called the Bambino range. I have tried a number of these over the years. Large parts of Melbourne are now virtually frost-free, so in suitable positions these bougainvilleas can flower year-round. I got rid of an orange-flowered form as I didn’t like the colour. Then I planted a white-flowered one on an obelisk, where it cohabited with the old tea rose commonly called here ‘Duchesse de Brabant’ (though correctly named ‘Comtesse de Labarthe’). The Duchess is pale pink, so the two looked good together. But then the bougainvillea forgot that it was supposed to be a dwarf sport and began to throw out great long stems that blew

around in the wind. Exit that plant. Now I am left with two bougainvilleas: a deep cyclamen pink one up the rear brick wall which is now a mass of colour, and a pale pink one which has climbed higher and so cascades down from the roof line. I didn't get round to pruning it earlier, so now in flower it is quite a sight. Neither plant gets any water.

Salvias have been a mainstay in my garden for a number of years. The *Salvia microphylla* form called Baby Sage has small, salmon-pink flowers, and gently sprawls on to the brick paving. It gets trimmed back once or twice a year, and is one of those happy accidents in planting that gardeners much appreciate. Nearby on a raised bed *S. greggii* 'Alba' has been doing well for quite a while. From time to time it is best renovated by the removal of old stems, but otherwise a clipping with sheep shears is enough. White-flowered plants are so nice to have spread around the garden.



Forms of *Rhipsalis*  
drawing by Geoff Crowhurst

There are two places next to the house sheltered with 50% shade cloth. In both I can have half-pots hanging from walls – a version of the green wall which has been much promoted lately. I have had good success with types of *Rhipsalis*, which although from tropical or sub-tropical areas seem quite adaptable. The species are spread from South America (Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina) to Africa, Madagascar and Sri Lanka. In their native



habitat they are epiphytic, growing on the bark, moss and leaf litter on tree branches, but I find they do well enough in a very porous mixture like orchid compost with coarse sand and/or perlite added.

Although botanically classified as cacti, the ones I have seem more like succulents and don't have any prickles or thorns. They haven't any leaves as such, but build up a hanging network of jointed stems of different shapes, sizes and green colour according to species. Most will from time to time have little white or cream starry flowers, followed by translucent or light-coloured round berries. Some species, none of which I grow, have pink or red flowers and similarly coloured fruits. My *rhipsalis* need almost no water in winter, but appreciate regular moisture in warm to hot weather, as might be expected from their origins. These intriguing plants grow readily from cuttings, and I have a few spots where I can add to my collection. The classification and naming of species is in a state of flux: I haven't tried to keep track of species names. They make an interesting and trouble-free addition to the garden.

## A FAVOURITE TREE: *CUSSONIA PANICULATA*

Margot Tobin

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We all have favourites in the garden and mine is the Mountain Cabbage Tree (*Cussonia paniculata*), native to South Africa where it is called the Highveld Cabbage Tree or Kiepersol. I fell for it back in 2012 during the MGS's AGM garden tours taking place in Adelaide. I still recall the moment I stood in the grass at the Waite Arboretum, surrounded by hundreds of beautiful trees including oaks, eucalypts, dragon trees and palms. I was mesmerised by a *Cussonia paniculata* standing about five metres high. I was eye level with its amazing trunk covered by bark with deep fissures. My eyes swept upward to its canopy where the large, digitate, grey-green leaves made me think of angular oak leaves. In fact I liked it so much that I gave the tree a brief hug, hoping the other visitors wouldn't notice. I knew immediately that I had to find out more and hopefully get my own *Cussonia paniculata*.

Every tree at the Waite Aboretum is labelled so a couple of quick photos of the tree and its label facilitated my research. I was ecstatic, the tree would be suitable for my future mediterranean garden in Fremantle, Western Australia (see my article 'Riot and Restraint' in *TMG* 92, April 2018.) It is evergreen and tolerates high temperatures but not frost; fortunately my coastal garden is walled so frost does not occur. The tree requires free-draining soil and very little water. Indeed, for the attractive textured trunk to develop properly, water must be applied sparingly.

I was immediately very lucky to source a small plant from the Diggers Club which is an Australian garden club focused on old varieties of vegetables, preserving plants, sustainability and helping to find solutions to climate change. Well known to Australian gardeners, Diggers are based at various locations around Melbourne and now have retail shops, display gardens and extensive mail order distribution. Like many of my plants, the little tree arrived well packed and ready for planting. My new garden wasn't ready so I found the largest pot I could and put my small friend into the potting mix with the promise that it wouldn't be long before it would be released into open ground.

Meanwhile at the 2017 MGS AGM and tours in Southern California I met Caroline Davies, our current MGS President. The following year I enjoyed a leisurely lunch at her home in Melbourne and while examining her pot garden I espied a small *Cussonia paniculata*. I called out to her with delight as I had not seen another at that stage. It is one of Caroline's favourites too and I promised her that I would write an article about this tree for the journal. So now I had seen three in Australia – the large one in the Waite Arboretum, the one in Caroline's pot garden and my little friend back home... thus one for every MGS Branch in Australia.



The leaves of *Cussonia paniculata*  
drawing by Simon Rackham

It has now become a source of shared enjoyment for Caroline and me when a *Cussonia paniculata* is discovered elsewhere. During the MGS' pre-AGM tour to Mallorca in 2018 we visited Heidi Gildemeister's garden. To my delight I saw an excellent specimen of my favourite and called back to Caroline, a few metres behind me, that there was one coming up. She had already identified it and was equally excited to see it. A few other members gave us strange looks, perhaps because

they don't find the tree unusual or particularly endearing. But this doesn't dampen my enthusiasm. We saw several other specimens during our tour in Spain and a few members commented that they were not uncommon in Mediterranean Europe. More recently when I was in Greece for the 2019 AGM I looked everywhere for *Cussonia paniculata* and did not see any either in Corfu or on the mainland. I didn't mind as there is joy in having something which one can think of as unusual. Certainly visitors to my garden have not seen the plant before and I have been asked many times what it is.

Other things overtook my intentions for the *Cussonia paniculata*. Some four years went by with my tree growing reasonably well in its pot, the trunk forming just as I hoped with its coarse bark. Knowing its natural habitat, I did feel a little guilty that I had not felt settled enough in my new house to put my friend into the open garden. It had reached only one metre in growth over this time. Soon, the removal of a tree which was not thriving was the opportunity to put the *Cussonia paniculata* into a situation it deserved. I was heartbroken when I saw that its roots had wrapped around the pot and although I planted it out I did more research. As I had suspected, these trees generally don't like pots and the internet reports that transplanting them is usually unsuccessful. As a back-up plan I tried to source another in Australia, which has proved impossible.

Two years on, my tree appears to be growing well. At least twice a year a new set of healthy leaves emerges from the top and some of the older ones drop off at the bottom, revealing a most beautiful straight trunk with rough bark. I look at my *Cussonia* every day and can now only hope that in the earth the tree has found room to spread its roots and will continue to grow to the five metres I am hoping for.

I probably shouldn't make any promises as it has taken me nearly two years to get around to writing this article, as promised to Caroline Davies. I think it is the perceived absence of the tree in Greece and the request from Caroline Harbourn for more articles that has finally got me motivated. If you have a *Cussonia paniculata* in your garden, do treasure it.

# TRAILING ROSEMARY

Eile Gibson

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In the village of Luzier in the Cévennes, there is the most spectacular gangly, gnarled prostrate rosemary, many metres in both width and length, trailing over an old dry-stone wall, also many, many years old – perhaps more than a hundred. When in flower the plant, which is certainly at least 25 years old, is alive with small bees and insects. And in another village not far away, Générargues, a newer, less beautiful wall of perhaps 20 metres is also host to trailing rosemary – in this case resembling woolly mammoths without the horns.

I have two areas for using trailing or prostrate rosemary in my garden, first of all to hide an ugly wall, built perhaps 40 years ago with too much cement and using a poor collection of stones. It will have been hard work to build but deserves to be hidden. (I find that not all artisans have good taste in my area and too much white cement is a common fault.) Elsewhere I am planting rosemary on my hill which I am wilding – successfully, I believe – with cistus, broom, American oak, heather and *Arbutus unedo* (the strawberry tree, proliferating at a fast rate despite the droughts and heat waves of the past two years).

The number one rule for rosemaries is *never* to feed and water them. That sounds harsh but I have learned from experience – I was nurturing my first shrub for two years, when it did nothing, despite regular watering and fertiliser, until finally it was on the verge of death. In her book *Mediterranean Gardening – a Waterwise Approach* Heidi Gildemeister advises that fertiliser and summer watering do more harm than good, which gave me the correct steer. She also advises never to clip into the wood. The following year, not having been fed and watered, the plant doubled in size, and this year it was covered in flowers as early as February.

The newly planted slope, covered with a very acid compost, is in its second year and I am pleased. Nestled near and around grevilleas which are very, very happy (they too get no feeding and watering), the rosemaries have shot out in all directions and appear to be thriving; I am not expecting many flowers this

spring but they are doing their job to cover as much ground as possible to save weeding in the coming years. Apparently their leaves contain essential oil glands which release chemical substances that inhibit the germination of competing species\*. I have inadvertently planted spring-flowering bulbs close to my sprawling rosemaries, with no ascertainable problem. As for the ugly wall, my plant prefers to grow upwards rather than downwards, and it may be that the shaggy beasts in Générargues would do the job I need.



Rosemary trailing down a dry-stone wall  
drawing by Simon Rackham

Hugo Latymer in his book *The Mediterranean Gardener* (Frances Lincoln) warns that *Rosmarinus officinalis* is only compact in its youth, thereafter becoming gnarled and straggling with age, which is how I like it. The great master Christopher Lloyd in *The Well-Tempered Garden* (Phoenix Paperback) says it all, asking why rosemary is not planted a great deal more, referring to its untamed beauty and the fact that it is an uncomfortable nonconformist, with its sprawliness being its principal charm. He refers to prostrate rosemary as being particularly tender, but

\* Olivier Filippi, *Planting Design for Dry Gardens* (page 206).

of course he is writing of the UK and I certainly do not find it so in the Cévennes.

I suspect that I have planted bog standard *Rosmarinus officinalis* but Olivier Filippi mentions *Rosmarinus mendizabalii* and a rarer species, the silver-leaved *Rosmarinus tomentosus*. In his book *Planting Design for Dry Gardens* (Filbert Press, 2016) he provides four pages on the plant with inspiring photographs. He too warns against feeding rosemaries and stresses their need for perfect drainage. What I haven't witnessed, as he describes on page 206, is a rosemary that shuts down in exceptional drought conditions, turning a golden colour until the first rains of autumn. I have noticed this month that one of my plants has dry brown branches which I am sure however are dead and not merely dormant.

For culinary purposes, a little rosemary goes a long way. However, to produce a decent tisane, fill the teapot to the top with small twigs and let it stew in hot water for at least five minutes – otherwise it is insipid.

# **A FIRST LOOK AT GREECE: A BOTANICAL TOUR AT 80 KILOMETRES PER HOUR**

Cheryl Renshaw

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Last June and July I was fortunate to be able to tag along on a family trip to Greece with my parents and 18-year-old niece. This was my first visit to any part of the Mediterranean, so I was very interested to see how Greece compares in climate to my native California.

We travelled as part of a tour group, first on a coach and then as a small group on a cruise ship. I thus did not have time to see Sparoza or any other gardens in Greece, so my impressions are based on fleeting (sometimes very fleeting) glimpses of plants and environments as we travelled through the country. We toured Athens, Corinth, Epidauros, Mycenae, Olympia, Delphi and Meteora by coach, and Mykonos, Patmos, Heraklion and Santorini by cruise ship.

## **Similarities and differences**

The Greek landscape and the Californian landscape have a lot of similar features and on the coach trip I kept connecting the areas we were driving through to a similar area in California. Athens reminded me of Southern California, maybe out in the hills near San Diego. The farms of the Peloponnese would not have looked out of place in the Salinas Valley. Meteora recalled Pinnacles (OK, maybe there were a few more monasteries...). The big environmental difference was the lack of fog; because the Eastern Mediterranean Sea is warmer than our part of the Pacific, the natural air conditioning we receive along the coast doesn't seem to occur, at least not in early July.

## **So many olives...**

Where California sometimes appears to have been taken over by vineyards, the cultivated plant I saw most often in Greece was the olive. At first the leaves seemed more silvery than olive trees in California, but I think that's because the wind was more



constant, so that I saw more of the leaves' undersides than their greener surfaces. Other plants I spotted while walking through archaeological sites or out of the coach window were the caper, *Capparis spinosa* (on every rock wall), *Nicotiana glauca* in a well on the Acropolis, *Pistacia lentiscus* and *P. terebinthus* at Mycenae, *Ferula communis* and a *Sideritis* species at Delphi, *Vitex agnus-castus* and an *Onopordum* species (which looked like wild artichokes from the highway) along the road to Olympia, oaks, oleanders, Aleppo pines, sycamores, bay laurel, and some sort of creeping thyme (or was it maybe *Thymbra*?) in bloom on the cliffs of Santorini. I found a little botanical walk at ancient Olympia that helped me identify some of the common plants. While on the coach tour my family and I made friends with a couple from Perth who turned out to be avid Western Australian gardeners. Ken and Glenys and I had great fun trying to identify blurry plants as we zoomed past them and they were thrilled to spot Australian natives – a *Callistemon* at an olive orchard, eucalypts everywhere.

Along with plants, my niece and I enjoyed spotting insects along the way: cicadas, ants and a tiny praying mantis.

I hope to return to Greece soon.



*Ferula communis* at Delphi  
drawing by Cheryl Renshaw

## DO YOU SEE?

Elayne Moisey

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We walk. For over forty years Roger and I have walked the mountains which surround Athens. There cannot be a path on Mt. Parnitha that we have not explored. Whenever we saw a likely path while on our peregrinations that was new to us, there would be our next sortie.

See a cyclamen, just one, and we are excited but the chances are that just a little further on there will be a clump, and then more, until the ground is carpeted. But that first sighting is the one that excites and the glorious carpet evokes our admiration of nature's ability to amaze. As the seasons change so does that first flower, that first exclamation of pleasure and the subsequent mass of blooms.

Often we find a flower that is a surprise. These surprises are our own private joy. We do not tell people where we find them because once word gets out they will be destroyed by eager gatherers. There was the narcissus in Chaos above Lavrion. How proudly it bloomed! And sure enough, we found its few friends nearby. When we went back a year later there was no sign of the previous year's pleasure. Then in Fascomilia near Varkiza we found a magnificent blue bloom, a deep cornflower colour and the size of a tea rose, a flower we had never seen before. This one we photographed and tried to get identified but no one could help. Each year we have looked for that sole soul but ne'er a sign.

In the second week of April each year we make a pilgrimage to our fritillary field. We had seen one magnificent fritillary above Avlonas on one of our earliest explorations but then no other, so when we discovered thousands all growing so close together that there was hardly room to see the earth we were thrilled. We have taken foreign friends to share the mass of flowers but never an Attica resident. Once the fritillaries are common knowledge the ground will be walked on and the plants trampled. We were horrified one year to see a lone marcher, obviously a man who was clocking up distance rather than admiring beauty, who strode across the field with no thought of what was underfoot, smashing the nodding heads like grapes in a wine press.

Then there is our annual iris pilgrimage. In recent years this area has become a popular patch of ground which the populus has started traversing, again with no thought of the miniature heads they are crushing. We have noticed that each year there are fewer yellow, white or blue petals to catch our eye. But we have seen more irises growing on our fritillary field.



*Tulipa sylvestris*  
drawing by Chevrel Traher

Until about four years ago we would make a trip to the tulips. These delicate blooms, perhaps only a few inches tall, grew where now “they” have cut a track. The roadworks decimated the tulips, decimated them to extinction, and we no longer even go to that area.

Perhaps one of the greatest excitements was one year when we found mushrooms growing under a lemon tree in our own orchard. These we easily identified and we were amazed to find they were the much sought-after Morella mushrooms. They have never come again.

How blessed we are, not only to have such beauty around us but to be able to see. So many people just walk on. Rejoice in seeing.



## BOOKS

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*Flora of the Mediterranean*  
*With California, Chile, Australia and South Africa*  
*An Illustrated Guide*

By Christopher and Başak Gardner

Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, ISBN 978-1-4729-7026-8.

Christopher and Başak Gardner, the owners of ViraNatura Tours, have long been associated with the MGS. Over the years they have organised and led several tours for the Society. I have been fortunate enough to have been a participant in two of these: to Morocco in 2014 and to Epirus in 2015.

Both were unforgettable experiences, each in its own way. Who could resist the opportunity to visit such exotic-sounding locations as Marrakech, Rabat, Volubilis, Fez, the Atlas Mountains, Casablanca...? The whole venture was made more educational by the encyclopaedic knowledge of our guides, Christopher and Başak. Epirus presented a different environment, but one that was no less interesting and informative, and where we were treated to the expertise of Christopher alone.

Unfortunately I missed out on a couple of the spring excursions that they arranged, such as that to the Canary Islands led by Başak. The one that I most regret missing was possibly the chance-of-a-lifetime trip to Uzbekistan. This failure was partially assuaged, or maybe made even more regrettable, when I saw, and ultimately purchased, Christopher and Başak's book, *The Flora of the Silk Road*. This provided an amazing

insight into what I had missed in an area that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the casual traveller to visit.

When I became aware that the Gardners had produced another similar volume, covering the flora of the mediterranean-climate areas of the world, I immediately made arrangements to acquire a copy. I presumed that it would be of the same high quality as its predecessor, and I was not disappointed. In fact as I flipped through its pages it brought back sharp memories of both the Morocco and the Epirus trips with its excellent photographs of many of the plants we had encountered on those excursions.

I remember mounds of *Euphorbia officinarum* and *E. resinifera* covering whole hillsides in Morocco and fields full of *Papaver rhoeas* interspersed with *Reseda alba* and swathes of *Lavandula stoechas*. On one occasion we came across a local lady sitting in one such field apparently watching over a solitary cow. On our approach she moved closer to her charge as if to protect it from this band of foreigners with their strange behaviour, walking along studying the ground and crouching or kneeling from time to time to take a photograph.

Then there were, inevitably, the plants that were growing from barely perceptible cracks in rockfaces in the mountain areas. There were the blue globes of *Globularia alypum* and the combination of colours of *Polygala balansae* that few would have thought of mixing together but that nevertheless worked beautifully – *Polygala balansae* is very different from its relative *P. myrtifolia* that is represented in so many of our gardens. On the subject of familiar garden plants it was stunning to see a hillside of *Retama raetam* all in full flower, rather than the single bush we have at home.

Memories of Epirus were equally evocative. Mention of *Narcissus poeticus* brought back a picture of the group wandering through a whole host of them. And so many more plants, too numerous to mention in detail, multiple varieties of orchid, *Asphodeline lutea*, *Fritillaria montana*, and a whole host of others. A truly amazing collection and variation of plants in such a relatively small area, all enjoyed and appreciated in the company of like-minded individuals from around the world.

Such are my memories of trips organised by the Gardners. It was thus hardly a surprise to me that they have now

produced another magnificent book on the mediterranean flora – I use a lower-case m deliberately here, for the book’s subtitle, *With California, Chile, Australia & South Africa*, indicates that it covers not only the Mediterranean Basin but also the other mediterranean-climate regions of the world. Indeed, the informative opening sections of the book include information on the mediterranean climate (what it is and where it is found) with maps. There is also fascinating information in the section ‘Shared Plants’ on how (and why) the same genera are often found in far apart geographical locations, *Quercus* and *Pinus* species around the Mediterranean Basin and in California, for example, or *Erica*, *Gladiolus*, *Drimia* and *Moraea* in the countries of the Mediterranean and in South Africa.

The section on ‘Plant Communities & Adaptations’ is also full of interest. Most of us tend to focus our attention on flowers and foliage but here we are reminded of the extent and functioning of root systems. Niche plants, relict plants and microclimates are all discussed. Useful sections on pollination, the importance of fire, the impact of humankind, invasive species and photographing flowers in the wild follow.

The main section consists of photographs of plants from the five mediterranean-climate regions of the world with an introduction to each region and comments. The book ends with a short bibliography, a glossary and an index of plant names, although for some reason these are not italicised.

I could write more about this publication but suffice it to say that Christopher and Başak Gardner have once again produced a book chock-full of beautiful photographs accompanied by informative text, one that I can highly recommend to anyone with an interest in the flora of the Mediterranean.

*John Joynes*

## **SUNDRIES**

### **GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2020**

All members are invited to attend the 26th General Assembly of the Mediterranean Garden Society which will be held in the Auditorium of the Yves Saint Laurent Museum, Marrakech, Morocco on Wednesday 21st October 2020 at 9.00 am.

We regret that there are no places left on the accompanying AGM programme of visits.

### **GREEK WEBSITE**

The Administrative Committee is looking for a volunteer to take over responsibility for the MGS's Greek website. The revival of this website is of great importance, particularly in view of the fact that the Society was founded in Greece and has its headquarters in this country.

This person will need to be a fluent Greek-speaker with an interest in selecting and posting information for our Greek members about mediterranean plants, gardens and all related subjects. It can be a fascinating job.

Might this person be you? If so, please contact the MGS President, Caroline Davies at [cdgt@netspace.net.au](mailto:cdgt@netspace.net.au).

### **A SECOND EDITION OF AN IMPORTANT BOOK**

Members may like to know that Olivier Filippi's excellent book *The Dry Gardening Handbook: Plants and Practices for a Changing Climate*, originally published in 2008 by Thames and Hudson and subsequently out of print, has recently been reissued by Filbert Press (2019, ISBN 978-1999734558).

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

This journal is also available in electronic form, linking you to photographs of some of the gardens or plants that feature in its articles.

If you'd like to receive your journal electronically, all you have to do is notify the MGS Secretary ([mgssecretary@gmail.com](mailto:mgssecretary@gmail.com)).

## THE CONTRIBUTORS

GEOFF CROWHURST was interested in plants and flowers from an early age. After completing a horticultural course he worked for a few years at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, and then in a retail nursery. Although he now lives in a single-front terrace home, he tries to make the most of the space he has, with plants up the back wall and along and over fences. Since he retired, every year he organises his own trips overseas, with a focus on gardens and wild flowers. He also belongs to and is active in a number of plant-related clubs and societies.

CAROLINE DAVIES, President of the Mediterranean Garden Society, gardens in Melbourne, Australia in two small courtyards overflowing with pots. Plants range from Mediterranean to tropical within this microclimate. Her particular interest is in cyclamen species, shrubby begonias, hellebores and *Vireya* rhododendrons, indicating the eclectic nature of her plantings. Until recently, with her late husband David Martin, she organised garden, wild flower and special interest tours to various countries in Europe, as well as around Australia and New Zealand, but her special love will continue to be the Greek flora.

CLARE DOIG is a retired gardener, (i.e. she gardens only for herself now). She and her husband, Gordon, have lived in Scotland for the last thirty years where they brought up their family of four girls. Her other great loves in life, apart from plants and flowers, are sewing and music, mainly church music and choral singing. They have a house in Acharavi in Corfu where, now that they are both retired and have more time, they are making a garden.

EILE GIBSON arrived in the Cévennes in 1990 with her then husband and immediately set about planting a garden, having in mind herbaceous plantings. She divides her time between London and the Cévennes, able to do so with flexible working thanks to the internet. There hasn't been a year during the 30 years of ownership when she hasn't extended a bed or created a new one. Her obsession with the garden is occasionally interrupted by visitors who are always welcome for a short period, unless of course they are serious gardeners as well. Her French friends and neighbours suggest that any further extensions will be impossible and the occasional unwitting non-gardener guest asks why she doesn't hire a gardener to do the work.

CAROLINE HARBOURI, a former President of the Mediterranean Garden Society and the editor of this journal, is a writer of fiction (under the name Petrie Harbouri), translator and free-lance editor with a long-standing interest in the flora and fauna of Greece. Her 'garden' in central Athens consists of pots.



JOHN JOYNES, a former Vice President of the Mediterranean Garden Society, came late to horticulture and is still trying to catch up. He has chosen Cyprus to attempt to do this with the help of his wife and an assortment of cats. He heads the Cyprus Branch of the MGS.

JULIE KINNEY is a passionate gardener who creates garden tours in Australia and elsewhere, always looking for that private and personal memorable experience to slot in. She has started two garden clubs since living in Margaret River, with the Mediterranean Gardening Margaret River open to all, including MGS members, 'to encourage gardening in our climate.' She published *The Garden Wanderer* in 2016 and hopes to have at least another book in her. She particularly covets summer-dry bulbs.

GLORIA LEINBACH is a third-generation southern Californian. Both of her grandmothers inspired her love of gardening, especially bulbs and roses. She has four garden areas, one being a steep hillside where she grows a potpourri of flora that include bulbs, fruit trees, hardy drought-resistant roses, and various mediterranean plants. Currently, she volunteers at the Banning Museum garden and helped establish a heritage rose garden there that consists of found roses from California's Gold Rush towns, old homesteads and cemeteries.

ELAYNE MOISEY grows flowers on her west verandah and vegetables on her east verandah but always leaves one cabbage for Madame Cabbage White and her caterpillars.

SEÁN O'HARA was an early adopter of the mediterranean-climate approach to horticulture. He corresponded with Derek Toms during the creation of the MGS. Since the 1990s he has created various Internet communities and websites (Medit-Plants, gardening in mediterranean climates worldwide). Along with tending his garden and collection of unusual plants, he also enjoys researching plant-related topics.

CHERYL RENSHAW is a landscape designer from Santa Clara, California. She is an Executive Committee member of the MGS's Northern California Branch. She and her husband are accomplished street painters who are invited to paint at festivals throughout North America. Their sadly out of date website is at <http://www.wr-architect.com/>.

ANDREW SLOAN retired to live in southern Spain in 1996 after twenty years working in Africa, Asia and South America. With his wife Margarita he designed their own house, built in the middle of their olive grove; he now enjoys walking in the hills, travelling and growing succulent plants, many from seed. He is the author of the aloes section in Plant galleries on the MGS website.

JUDY THOMAS holds Masters degrees in Biology and in Education. She retired in 2007 from a thirty-year full-time teaching position in the Department of Landscape Horticulture at Merritt College, Oakland, California and now works as an Arboricultural Consultant and

Horticultural Advisor. She is a Board Certified Master Arborist with the International Society of Arboriculture, a Registered Consulting Arborist with the American Society of Consulting Arborists, and a Certified Aesthetic Pruner with the Aesthetic Pruners Association. She serves on the Advisory and Executive Committees of the Northern California Branch of the MGS.

MARGOT TOBIN, Head of the West Australia Branch of the MGS, calls Fremantle, Western Australia home and enjoys a beautiful coastal location, not without its gardening challenges. Salt winds and poor soil test her skills but the magnificent location between the sea and river keep her centred. Her home has been designed around three garden areas which are seen from everywhere in the house. She has been a member of MGS since 2012 and finds the travel to AGMs stimulating and fun.

CHRISTOPH WIESCHUS is a landscape architect and international consultant who has been living and gardening in Malta since 1993. With Nils Bodeker and Charles Quest-Ritson he has published a database on plants for mediterranean gardens *Plantus South*, available in several languages. In 2014, also with two colleagues, he published *Manual of Arriyadh Plants* (in Saudi Arabia). It is out of print but may be downloaded as a pdf-file from [http://www.ada.gov.sa/res/ada/ar/Publications/Arriyadh\\_Plants\\_EN/files/assets/basic-html/page-2.html](http://www.ada.gov.sa/res/ada/ar/Publications/Arriyadh_Plants_EN/files/assets/basic-html/page-2.html).

SIMON WINDELER and his partner Michael Athen began nurturing a large garden on the island of Tilos in the Dodecanese, Greece, five years ago, spending short visits there as often as their jobs allowed, as they both work full-time in Germany. They are currently on sabbatical on Tilos, encouraging new plants and trees to grow in keeping with the indigenous character of the rugged terrain.



Seed cases of *Pancratium maritimum*

drawing by Clare Doig



