



THE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN SOCIETY

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BRANCH

An international forum devoted to furthering knowledge and appreciation of plants and gardens suited to the mediterranean climate regions of the world

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Amaryllis belladonna L.

Amaryllidaceae

Amaryllis belladonna is native to the South Western Cape of South Africa. The bulb is typically large, brown and rounded and has a moderate growth rate. The large clusters of scented, trumpet-shaped pink or white flowers are carried on a long purplish-red and green stem appearing 20in(50cm) above the soil. Up to twelve flowers are produced from the flowering stem. These flowers are 4in (10cm) long and apically flare open about 3in (8cm). Protruding from each flower is a long upturned style amongst a group of large curved anthers. The anthers are black and shiny at first, but split open to reveal masses of sticky white pollen. The inflorescence tends to face the direction that receives the most sun. Although most flowers are pale pink, white and dark pink forms occur.

The strap-like leaves are deciduous and are produced after flowering. The leaves remain green throughout the winter. The leaves produce a starch, which is stored in the bulb. In summer the leaves die back and the bulb becomes dormant. This strange phenomenon of flowering before the leaves appear is known as hysteranthly. The specific flowering time is late summer, July and August (February and March in South Africa).

Amaryllis belladonna in its natural habitat is found in small dense groups among rocks in the fynbos, the South African equivalent of our dense California chaparral. The most impressive flowering of *Amaryllis belladonna* in the wild occurs after fires in the fynbos. Cultivated plants can flower regularly each year, so fire would not seem to be an importance trigger. It has been observed that brush clearing around wild populations is also followed by prolific flowering, so a bright exposure for the bulbs to 'bake' during the summer dormant period would appear to be important to promote flowering. Evidence for this can also be found in cultivated plants, which are reticent to flower in shaded situations.

The latin genus *Amaryllis* is Greek feminine and is named after a beautiful shepherdess referred to in Roman pastoral poetry. The specific epithet *belladonna* means beautiful lady. The appearance of the tall, flower stalk without any leaves accounts for the common name "naked lady". In South Africa, this bulb called 'March lily', referring to the month of its flowering. Other common names include 'belladonna Lily', in the UK 'Jersey Lily', as 'St. Rosalina' in Sicily, or 'St. Rosa' or The Madonna Lily in Italy, and sometimes in Spain as 'Meninas Para Escola', translating to 'girls going to school' as they bloom in at the beginning of the school year (late September) when girls in pink uniforms start attending classes. The curious Portuguese name 'Bordao de Sao Jose' (St. Joseph's Staff), is a reference to a vision by 20th century mystic Maria Valtorta, where she relates that St. Joseph was chosen to become the husband of the Virgin because of pink flowers which miraculously sprouted from his dry staff. (continued on page 2)



2005 FALL GARDEN TOUR

A selection of gardens in the East Bay
Berkeley/Oakland

September 10th, 10am-4pm

\$30 per person

Many of gardens in our area are easily at their peak during Spring, but creating a design that can successfully hold our interest after our long warm and dry summers can often be elusive. The idea behind our Fall garden tours is to showcase concepts that accept and even celebrate our summer dry climate, providing a rich garden experience in spite of summer's rigors.

Join us for a varied tour of some distinct gardens, large & small, hillside & urban, classic & innovative. A BOX LUNCH will be included and we will enjoy WINE & CHEESE in a garden surrounding a historic Maybeck house that survived the Oakland Hills fire of 1991.

To register, call Sue Ann Manners: 925-254-0226

Portugal was likely responsible for the introduction of *Amaryllis belladonna* in to Europe, possibly as early as the late 15th or early 16th century. Portuguese ships engaged in spice trade used the South African Cape as a stopping point on their way to the Indies. While there is no actual record of this introduction, the early appearance of this bulb in various Portuguese ports of call is highly suggestive.

The cultivation of *Amaryllis belladonna* requires very little attention. *Amaryllis belladonna* can be grown from seed. The soft fleshy white to pink seed, which ripen in late August (or March in South Africa) should be planted when fresh. Dispersal of seed in winter is normally by wind. In South Africa, seed dispersal is timed to coincide with the first winter rains in late March and April. In California, natural rainfall in September is generally not sufficient to trigger germination, nor consistent enough through our Fall to successfully raise the young seedlings. Germination can occur in two weeks, and seedlings will require some supplemental water during the first winter to ensure sufficient growth to survive the next summer's dormancy. Seedling will flower in three to six years, or longer. Large clumps of bulbs can be divided from the mother bulb during the dormant period. The bulbs and offsets can be planted immediately, with their necks at soil level. *Amaryllis belladonna* can also be grown in large pots using a very porous soil mix. The bulb can also tolerate quite arid conditions.

There is still some mystery as to what pollinates the large, showy and fragrant flowers of *Amaryllis belladonna*. Rudolf Marloth, a famous amateur botanist, believed that the belladonna lily was being pollinated by a hawk moth. It was also noticed that large carpenter bees visited the flowers during the day. On the Cape Peninsula, at least, it seems that bees are the main pollinators of the *Amaryllis belladonna*. In its homeland, this bulb is often attacked by a highly destructive black and yellow striped caterpillar called

lily borer. In California, no significant pests have been recorded.

The family Amaryllidaceae forms a large group of over sixty genera, which are mainly centered in the southern Africa with smaller distributions in Andean South America. Other genera that belong to this family that have horticultural importance and are found in southern Africa include *Brunsvigia*, *Clivia*, *Crinum*, *Cyrthanthus*, *Nerine* and *Scadoxus*. *Hippeastrum*, a large South American genus, some gardeners mistakenly call amaryllis because it was once considered by botanists to be included in the genus *Amaryllis*. Other northern hemisphere genera include *Narcissus* (daffodils) and *Leucojum*.

Amaryllis belladonna was first successfully crossed with the closely related genus *Brunsvigia* in the mid 19th century in Australia. The resulting plants, now generally referred to under the name *xAmarygia*, often closely resemble *Amaryllis belladonna*, except for their larger number of flower and wider diversity of colors (whites, pinks, reddish-pink, and bicolors). Hybrid crosses with *Nerine* (*xAmarine*) and *Crinum* (*xAmarcrinum*) have also been made.

Another bulb often called 'naked lady' is *Lycoris squamigera* from China. It flowers in a similar fashion (leafless) and a similar time (late July) as *Amaryllis belladonna*, but is better adapted to colder, summer wet climates. The flowers tend to be a more lavender pink color and are held upright and encircling the stems rather than the more typical one-sided, pendant manner of *Amaryllis*. Because of the confusion between these two species, bulbs of this *Lycoris* species are sometimes offered under the name of *Amaryllis belladonna*.

This article was adapted, with permission, from an article by Trevor Adams, Kirstenbosch, March 2001, published on the website of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (www.plantzafrica.com), and from information found on David Fenwick's website 'The African Garden' (www.theafricangarden.com).



Arbor Day - Revisited?

The first Arbor Day took place on April 10, 1872 in Nebraska. It was the brainchild of Julius Sterling Morton (1832-1902), a Nebraska journalist and politician originally from Michigan. In the years following that first Arbor Day, Morton's idea spread beyond Nebraska into other states and in 1970, President Richard Nixon proclaimed the last Friday in April as National Arbor

Day. Arbor Days in each state vary, in consideration of the local climate; California's time period being March 7-14. This is earlier than in those states with cold winter climates, but is it really the proper time to plant trees?

Many SF Bay Area city tree departments have adopted fall/winter planting schedules, from October through January. This is in response to studies done at the University of California, Davis, which showed that trees planted in Spring, even if watered carefully, tend to suffer markedly over our hot summers, while the same trees planted the following fall, do not experience this setback and are often much further along in their growth the following Spring than their counterparts that have been in the ground a full 12 months (apparently the 'summer setback' can take more than a single wet season to recover from).

It is well known that fall planting in our local mediterranean climate helps promote rapid establishment of all plants

(except marginally hardy species). The cooler temperature and mild, wet weather of our winters favor the healthy growth of root systems, in both evergreen and deciduous plants. Most of our annual rainfall comes during January and February, providing deep watering and encouraging subsoil root growth (artificial irrigation, even done properly, tends to favor surface rooting which is susceptible to sudden drying during the warm months).

The City of Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation Department now celebrates Arbor Day in September. 'Tree Davis has their seasonal planting of new street trees and replacements in January and February (weather permitting). Marin ReLeaf sponsors acorn planting of native oak species in the fall. A number of US States in the South have already moved their Arbor Day celebrations to the fall/winter - perhaps it is time for California to consider officially moving its Arbor Day to this more appropriate season? Sean O'Hara

Salmorejo

(cream of gazpacho soup)



A smooth, thick, almost foamy cold tomato soup common in Andalucia, a variation on gazpacho with a small amount of water and far fewer vegetables, heightened by the taste of a quality extra virgin olive oil and a shock of fine sherry wine vinegar. Salmorejo has become so popular you now find it served throughout Spain. The following recipe is from the American chef Richard Stephens, chef-owner of the restaurant La Gamella in Madrid. He follows the cardinal rule of the dish: the tomatoes must not only be ripe, they must also be aromatic; and the soup must be left overnight to rest so the flavor will properly develop.

This rich, salmon-pink soup is garnished with ribbons of serrano ham and cubed whites of hard-cooked eggs, creating a stunningly beautiful visual contrast.

- 2 pounds red ripe, meaty, and juicy tomatoes
- 3 cups cubed stale crustless bread
- 1 large garlic clove
- Coarse salt
- Pinch of sugar
- 1/3 cup cubed green or red bell pepper
- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons aged sherry wine vinegar
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1/3 cup thinly sliced cured ham, preferably Spanish serrano ham
- 2 hard-cooked egg whites, finely diced

One at a time, pierce the stem end of a tomato with a long fork and hold over a high flame to char all over until the skin blisters, or sear in a dry cast-iron skillet. Cool, then peel. Cut a slice off the top of each tomato, scoop out the watery seeds, and strain over a bowl to collect the juices. Discard the seeds. Cut up the tomatoes.

In a large bowl, mix the tomatoes with the bread and let stand for at least 20 minutes.

Crush the garlic to a paste with 1 teaspoon coarse salt. Add to the tomatoes and bread along with the sugar and bell pepper. Puree the mixture in batches in a blender until smooth. If necessary, add a little water. The soup must be very thick and smooth. With the machine on, add the olive oil in a steady stream to form a very thick soup, the consistency of yogurt. Add the vinegar. Whirl the soup on the highest setting until it becomes foamy, about 2 minutes. Scrape the mixture back into the bowl, cover, and refrigerate for at least 12 hours.

To serve, thin with ice-cold water to a thick creamy soup. Correct the seasoning. Ladle into small soup bowls and garnish with the ham and egg whites. Serve cold.

Serves 4 to 6; makes about 4 cups

from **The Slow Mediterranean Kitchen**
Recipes for the Passionate Cook
by Paula Wolfert
John Wiley & Sons; ISBN: 0471-26288-9

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

of interest to our membership

August 13th (Saturday), 10am-12:30pm, East Bay

NEW NATURALISM: WEAVING FORM, FOLIAGE, & TEXTURE IN A REGIONALLY APPROPRIATE MEDITERRANEAN GARDEN - A workshop with Anthony Garza, 10 am to 12:30 pm, in an East Bay private garden, the Garden Conservancy. Fee \$40; pre-registration required. To register, or for more info call 415-561-7895, or see www.gardenconservancy.org/speakingfromexperience.htm.

August 21th (Sunday), noon-4pm, San Luis Obispo *

GARDEN TOUR FEATURING THE WORK OF CHRISTY EDSTROM O'HARA award winning landscape designer and MGS Central California Branch co-head. Two projects will be highlighted with personal tours by the designer: Tolosa Winery and a private garden in Shell Beach. Free to all MGS members, non-members \$20. To register, contact Virginia Siemsen – lavenderblue@flash.net, 805-541-4626, cell 805-801-1568. You must register before August 17th.

September 10th (Saturday), East Bay *

FALL GARDEN TOUR – see front page for details.

September 14th (Wednesday), 7:30pm, Peninsula

ADVENTURES WITH PROTEACEAE - A lecture with Brett Hall of the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum, 7:30 pm; Western Horticultural Society. Covington Elementary School, 205 Covington Road, Los Altos, 408-867-9428, www.westernhort.org.

October 2nd (Sunday), 9am-3pm, East Bay

Fall Plant Sale, featuring unique native and exotic plants, 9 am to 3 pm, Landscape Horticulture Department, Merritt College, 12500 Campus Drive, Oakland, 510-436-2418.

October 8th (Saturday), 9:30am-2pm, Walnut Creek

Bearded Iris and Fall Plant Sale, featuring divisions from Mrs Bancroft's vintage bearded iris collection, The Ruth Bancroft Garden. 1500 Bancroft Road, Walnut Creek, www.ruthbancroftgarden.org, 925/210-9663, Admission \$7.

October 16th (Sunday), 3-6pm, San Francisco

A PLANTSMAN'S ART COLLECTION – A special reception, sale, and auction, to benefit the Helen Crocker Russell Library, featuring more than 100 pictures from 18th-century prints to 20th-century watercolors (from historic prints to recent watercolors) from the estate of Wayne Roderick; San Francisco Botanical Garden Society at Strybing Arboretum, 415-661-1316 x303. These works will be on display at the Library during the months of October through December, daily except major holidays, 10 am to 4 pm.

October 20-23 Carmona (Andalucia), Spain *

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MGS – a number of Northern California Branch members will represent us this year (this month's recipe from Andalucia, at left, is in honor of this event!).

* MGS sponsored/supported event



The above Spanish courtyard illustrates the current Journal (no.41) article entitled *In Search of Gardens in Andalusia* by the MGS President, Cali Doxiadis. You should be receiving this issue soon. Later this month, look for more illustrations to this article on the MGS web site.

We invite you to join the Mediterranean Garden Society to learn more about gardening in our unique and desirable climate. Memberships are for the calendar year (Jan-Dec), and all members receive the Society journal, *The Mediterranean Garden*, which contains articles written by members worldwide. If you join mid-year, you will receive all journal issues for that year.

Annual membership is \$35
 Life membership is \$350
 Send your personal check or credit card information to:
The MGS Secretary
Sparoza, P.O.Box 14
GR-190 02 Peania, GREECE
 (International letter postage is ~~80¢~~)
 tel/fax: (30 1) 664 3089
 email: mgssec@hol.gr

Payment of dues for the Mediterranean Garden Society includes you in this Branch if your address is within our range or if you specify branch inclusion directly on the membership form. You can join at any of our events or send your application separately. For a membership form, contact Sue Ann Manners, (925) 254-0226, or visit the MGS web site:

www.MediterraneanGardenSociety.org

This newsletter is published in the FALL, WINTER, & SPRING (dormant in SUMMER!) to announce the events and news of the Northern California Branch of the MGS.
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The 2005 fall garden tour is September 10th, in the Berkeley/Oakland area!