

Plant of the Week

Calodendrum capense Cape Chestnut

This lovely, flowering tree, *Calodendrum capense*, is yet another **African** plant which has found its way into gardens around the world. The **Cape Chestnut**, in spite of its name, is not related to European Chestnuts which belong in the Oak and Beech family (Fagaceae). In fact, it belongs in the **Rutaceae**, so is closely related to *Citrus*, *Boronia*, *Eriostemon* and many important Australian rainforest trees, such as **Australian Teak** – *Flindersia australis*. And the **Cape Chestnut** doesn't just grow in **South Africa**: it is widespread through countries of eastern Africa, extending into the equatorial highlands of **Kenya**¹.



It is said that when botanist **Carl Peter Thunberg**, known as the “**father of South African Botany**”, first sighted the tree in 1772, he was so excited that he used his gun to shoot down branches so that he could examine the flowers at close hand¹.

In Sydney, **Cape Chestnuts** flower from November through to December. This is the time when we also enjoy the scarlet flowers of Illawarra Flame Trees, the soft mauve blue of Jacaranda and the golden spires of Silky Oaks. Look for clouds of soft, pink flowers on trees with rounded crowns, often in older suburbs of Sydney. Don't forget too, that a trip on a Sydney Harbour Ferry, to Watsons Bay, Manly or to Parramatta, will give you wonderful views of these beautiful summer flowering trees.

¹ Alice Notten, Kirstenbosch National Botanic Garden:
<http://www.plantzafrica.com/planted/calodendcape.htm>
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