

## Plant of the Week

# *Bougainvillea*



This year the **Bougainvilleas** around the suburbs of Sydney are quite outstanding but the brilliant colours are not due to the flower



petals but to coloured modified leaves known as bracts. The flowers are the small white tubes in the centre and arranged in threes. On close inspection you can see that the flowers have five petals which are fused into a tube.

**Bougainvilleas** are very easy to grow, but for the small garden the variety should carefully chosen as they can escape into trees and over houses using their very thorny stems as scrambling supports. Pruning them back into control invariably results in nasty scratches which can lead to allergic reactions. Botanists are divided as to how many species (up to 18) make up the genus **Bougainvillea** and the taxonomy is confounded by many natural hybrids as well as vegetative mutations or “sports”.

My gardening and botanical interests started in Britain and **Bougainvilleas** were always memories of holidays in exotic warmer places, as most cultivars are frost tender.



**Bougainvilleas** were brought to Europe from South America by the 1768 French ‘Round the World’ voyage lead by **Admiral Louis Antoine de Bougainville**. The botanist on the expedition who collected *Bougainvillea* and named it for his leader, was **Philibert Clemmerçon**, who trained as a Physician but had wide interests including collecting fish from the Mediterranean for Linneaus.



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