



# FREAKY FLORA

Los Angeles County Arboretum & Botanic Garden

*Weave your way through the garden to discover the eerier side of our collections!*

*Look for the scarecrows along the paths-- They indicate a stop on the Freaky Flora route.*

*Stops are found all throughout the garden and do not need to be followed in any specific order.*

*\*Location #'s listed under each stop correspond to the map on the last page.*

**BLOODLEAF PLANT:** Named for its deep red appearance, the bloodleaf plant is also known as the chicken gizzard plant, the beefsteak plant, and other descriptive names.

*(Map Location- Intersection of Mediterranean Garden & Forest Path)*

**ROSEMARY:** Traditionally placed in funeral bouquets to symbolize remembrance, the strong scent of rosemary also helped to disguise the smell of corpses!

*(Map Location- Garden For All Seasons)*

**POMEGRANATE:** The pomegranate fruit has a long mythological history that spans many cultures and religions. In Greek mythology, the pomegranate was known as the "fruit of the dead." According to Greek myth, Demeter was the goddess of agriculture, fertility, and the harvest. Her daughter Persephone was abducted by Hades, the god of the underworld, and taken to be his queen. Demeter was overcome with grief and searched for her daughter relentlessly. When she finally found out that Persephone had eaten from the pomegranate of the underworld, she was heartbroken. According to the myth, Persephone had eaten six pomegranate seeds, which meant that she had to spend six months of the year in the underworld with Hades and six months on the surface with her mother Demeter. As a punishment, Demeter was said to have caused the land to become barren and lifeless for the six months that Persephone was in the underworld, which is the reason for the seasons changing. This is why ancient Greeks believed that the winter was caused by Demeter being unhappy and not allowing the crops to grow. Demeter's punishment for Persephone's actions is a representation of the cycle of death and rebirth, the fading of life in winter, and the rejuvenation of life in spring. This myth is often interpreted as symbolizing the changing of seasons, the fertility of the earth and the importance of the underground in agriculture.

\*With an internal appearance that bears resemblance to internal human anatomy, and its ability to “bleed” a liquid that looks so similar to blood, it is easy to assume why the pomegranate would be associated not only with death, but also with fertility.

*(Map Location- Herb Garden)*

**WHITE SAGE:** A fairly common practice for dispelling evil or negative energy, Native Americans were the first on record as burning white sage in a ritual manner. For many of these cultures, white sage went by the name “Sacred Sage.” Burning sage was used to banish unwanted, dark energies, and to communicate with the spirit realm in order to request cleansing and allow protective energy to infuse a space.

*(Map Location- Crescent Farm)*

**FIGS:** Figs are pollinated by female wasps that crawl inside the fig to lay her eggs through a small passage, during which she loses her wings and antennae, ultimately trapping her inside. She lays her eggs inside the fig, and baby wasps are born. Though the male babies, wingless, emerge first and mate with the baby females, and then die. The female babies exit the fig to repeat the cycle of pollination and reproduction. The mother, however, is doomed to die inside the fig. Luckily for us, the fig produces an enzyme that digests the dead insect, turning her carcass into protein. The crunchy bits we eat are seeds, not wasp parts.

*(Map Location- Crescent Farm)*

**DRAGON TREE:** This tree gets its name from an ancient Greek legend. According to the tale, Hercules was sent to steal the golden apples of the Hesperides, which were guarded by Ladon, a serpent-like dragon. Ladon had a hundred heads and lived twisted around a tree in the Garden. The mighty Hercules slayed the ferocious Ladon, and the dragon’s blood flowed out over the land, sprouting ‘dragon’ trees. Ladon was placed among the stars by the gods as the Constellation Draco. And the dragon trees, with their long, slender succulent trunks and prickly leaves, continue to bleed the death of Ladon. Like the unfortunate dragon, the tree secretes a red resin when it is injured. In ancient times, the resin was believed to have magical and medicinal properties.

*(Map Location- Canary Islands)*

**BAT'S WING CORAL TREE:** This tree gets its name from the unique shape of the leaves. The leaflets have a broad wedge-shape with three lobes, resembling a bat's open wings!

*(Map Location- Eucalyptus)*

**RAINBOW DREAM SNAKE:** There is a giant serpent that weaves its way through the Australian garden! Based on an Australian Aboriginal creation story, the Rainbow Dream Snake, while a benevolent protector of the people, is a malevolent punisher of lawbreakers, penalizing them with violent storms and floods.

*(Map Location- Serpent Trail entrance near Tropical Greenhouse)*

**MADAGASCAR SPINY FOREST:** Weave your way through thorns, spikes, spines, and other prickly plants in this creepy but fascinating biome. The plants of the Madagascar Spiny Forest habitat, offering striking sculptural forms and fascinating adaptations, represent one of the most endangered floras on Earth.

*(Map Location- Madagascar Spiny Forest)*

**MOUSE TRAP TREE:** Look closely and you may spot one of this tree's 1 ½ to 2-inch horned seed pods with tiny barbed "fishhooks" at the end of their many stalks. Those hooks allow the pods to latch onto large animals for a free ride to seed dispersal, but reportedly can catch small animals, such as mice, as well. Some botanists once believed that this was by design, so that the tree would benefit from the nutrients in dead mice decomposing atop its soil, though the idea that the mouse trap tree was indirectly carnivorous has since been debunked.

*(Map Location- Madagascar Spiny Forest)*

**PUYA PLANT:** Botanists have noted the Puya as hazardous to sheep and birds which may become entangled in the spines of its leaves. If the animal dies, the plant may gain nutrients as the animal decomposes nearby. Because of this, some botanists once believed the Puya to be indirectly carnivorous, because it lacks the ability to either directly digest nutrients from its prey, but rather has the ability to trap it, however the idea that the Puya is indirectly carnivorous has since been debunked. The Puya plant has earned the nickname "sheep-eating plant."

*(Map Location- Desert Display Garden)*

**AFRICAN SUMAC TREE:** Though its outside branches are lush and green, step beyond them to enter a dark tree cave of spindly, gangly, tangled branches that create a very creepy, mysterious atmosphere!

*(Map Location- Aloe Trail)*

**EPIPHYTIC CACTI:** Most of the cacti in this encaged area are pollinated not by bees or birds or butterflies, but by bats! When the night-blooming cacti open, they emit a sweet odor, and the bats seek out the source of this highly attractive scent. They poke their long noses deep into the tubular cactus flowers reaching for the sweet nectar, and lick at it with their long tongues.

*(Map Location- Westmost end of Garden For All Seasons)*

**OAK TREES:** In folklore, trees are often said to be the homes of tree spirits. Revered by them as a sacred tree, Druids reportedly gathered under Oak Trees to conduct ceremonies and divination rituals.

*(Map Location- Library/Celebration Garden intersection)*

**SUGAR CANE:** We have this sweet natural treat to thank for all our Halloween candy! Raw sugar cane, however, tastes quite different from our October sweets. Cane sugar is unrefined, and compared to white sugar, tastes far less sweet. It is unprocessed, and retains a lot of the nutrients present in cane juice, including 17 amino acids, 11 minerals, and 6 vitamins, as well as antioxidants that may help reverse oxidative damage.

*(Map Location- Garden For All Seasons)*

**BAMBOO:** In Bangladesh, it is believed that ghosts called Besho Bhoot live in bamboo groves. People from rural Bengal believe that harmful ghosts dwell within the bamboo, and one should not walk past these areas after dusk. It is said that when a bamboo leans or lays on the ground, one should always walk around it, because when one tries to cross the bamboo, the bamboo is pulled back straight up by an unseen force, and the person can die as a result. There are also tales of a gusty wind that blows inside the bamboo forests while the weather is calm on the outside.

*(Map Location- Tallac Knoll Road Entrance/Restrooms adjacent)*

**STRANGLER FIG:** The strangler fig is so named because they grow on host trees, and slowly choke them to death! Once established, a young strangler fig begins sending aerial roots down to the ground, where they quickly dive into the soil and anchor themselves. The roots may dangle from the host tree's canopy or creep down its trunk. Once in

contact with the ground, the fig experiences a growth spurt, consuming moisture and nutrients that the host tree needs. The strangler fig's roots then surround the host tree's roots, cutting off its supply of water and nutrients, ultimately killing the host tree. The host likely dies from being shaded by the fig canopy.

*(Map Location- Tallac Knoll)*

- **DON'T MISS THIS!** If you look closely deep within the palm and bamboo trees across the road from the Adobe, you will find a palm tree that has been almost entirely devoured by a strangler fig!

*(Map Location- Palm & Bamboo Collections)*

**FLOR DE CACAO:** The flowers of this tree have been used by native peoples in Guatemala for preserving food— and bodies. The pleasant fragrance stays in dry flowers for decades, thus they were used for funeral ceremonies and were found in crypts still fragrant after many years. This feature of the flower gave the plant another common name- “funeral tree.”

*(Map Location- Tallac Knoll)*

**WHITE FLOWERS:** While white flowers represent innocence and purity in American culture, they mean the opposite in Chinese culture. White represents death, grief, and ghosts in Chinese culture, and white is often found at funerals. In the West, weddings are often decorated with bundles of white roses, however bringing white flowers to a Chinese wedding could get you taken off the guest list for future occasions, as white blossoms are associated with funerals rather than weddings.

*(Map Location- Rose Garden)*

**POTIONS:** What we today refer to as herbal medicine was once considered the potions of witches! During times when female healers were persecuted as witches for brewing herbal medicines, it is believed that euphemisms for certain plants arose to create a more covert language around them. For example: Evidence suggests that “eye of newt” referred to mustard seeds, “gall of goat” referred to both honeysuckle and St. John's wort, and “scale of dragon” referred to tarragon. Explore the herb garden and its signs and discover what modern “potions” this garden currently contains.

*(Map Location- Herb Garden)*

**FENNEL:** Fennel was valued as a magic herb. In the Middle Ages, it was draped over doorways on Midsummer's Eve to protect the

household from evil spirits. As an added measure of protection, the tiny seeds were stuffed into keyholes to keep ghosts from entering the room.

*(Map Location- Herb Garden)*

**WORMWOOD**: Legend has it that this plant first sprang up on the impressions made from the serpent's tail as he slithered his way out of the Garden of Eden. According to folk beliefs, wormwood was fabled to deprive a man of his courage, but a balm made from it was supposed to be effective in driving away goblins who came at night. In early Egyptian scripts, it was described as a medicine to rid the body of worms.

*(Map Location- Herb Garden)*

**WATERFALLS**: In Malaysian culture, it is believed that a ghost named Hantu Bandan lives in waterfalls. With a head shaped like an inverted cauldron, these waterfall guardians dwell in the space where the waterfall and the surface below it crash together. Legend has it that when Hantu Bandan surfaces, it will float unmoved by the strong current of the waterfall. This folktale has been used to caution children against getting too close to dangerous falls (and instead stick to the rivers and the lakes they're used to).

*(Map Location- Meyberg Waterfall)*

**BRIDGES**: Bridges have always been a source of dark myths and legends. Some tell of bridges being built by the devil in return for the first living creature that crosses over them. In many of these legends, the devil is outwitted by the individual wishing to cross, who sends an animal across instead of a human victim.

*(Map Location- Turtle Pond)*

**ANGEL'S TRUMPET**: For millennia, shamans have used the angel's trumpet as a sacrament in their rituals and ceremonies, often to gain entrance to other worlds of existence. It was believed that by consuming a tea made from the flowers, a shaman could fight evil forces, communicate with the dead, and forge a spiritual union with ancestors. The flower, being aimed downwards, also resembles the angelic horns in tarot cards, which point downwards to awaken the dead. These associations, combined with brugmansia's psychoactive properties, have contributed to its use in religion and the occult arts for years.

*(Map Location- Herb Garden)*

# The Arboretum



### TALLAC KNOLL

Enjoy a majestic view of the San Gabriel Mountains amid the magnificent Engelmann Oak Grove, serene Aquatic Garden, and fanciful Plumeria Grove.



### IDEA GARDENS

Small landscapes offer examples of water-saving plants, food to grow, and stunning desert flora. Exotic and indoor plants can be found in the Tropical Greenhouse.



### AUSTRALIA

The Serpent Trail snakes around plants, such as acacia, bottle trees, grevilleas, and other plants from regions of Australia where the climate is similar to Southern California.



### MEADOWBROOK

Visit Meyberg Waterfall and explore the nearby seasonally blooming Garden of Quiet Reflection, Kallam Perennial Garden, Crescent Farm, and Herb Garden.



### HISTORIC CIRCLE

The Reid-Baldwin Adobe, Queen Anne Cottage, Coach Barn, Santa Anita Train Depot, and Rose Garden are all located on the south side of Baldwin Lake. Head north to find the dense lush Forest Path.



### AFRICA

Experience otherworldly plants gathered from Madagascar, Canary Islands, and South Africa as you meander along the Aloe Trail.

**WALKING & BIRDING**  
Over two miles of paved roads are available for walking and more than 200 different bird species sighted.