

Plant of the Month

January
2025

Common Name: Paper Gardenia

Scientific Name: *Tabernaemontana cerifera*

Family: Apocynaceae

Genus: *Tabernaemontana* – for a 16th century German botanist known as Tabernaemontanus

Species epithet: *cerifera* - wax bearing

Distribution

Widespread on the island of New Caledonia.

Native Habitat

Rainforest or broadleaf evergreen forest at low altitudes in areas of high rainfall.

Description

A small to medium sized evergreen tree or large shrub up to five metres tall and 3 to 4 metres wide. It has large, glossy bright green leaves arranged in opposing pairs along the stem. Like other members of the Apocynaceae family it exudes poisonous, white, latex-like sap when wounded.

Flowers

Five petaled white star-shaped flowers throughout summer. Flowers have a gardenia-like fragrance stronger at night. The bases of the petals are fused to make a long thin nectar containing tube. Flowers are pollinated by moths, active at night.

Fruit

Green boat shaped pods occur in pairs and can usually be found on the plant from mid to late summer.

Location in Garden

Various locations including: Spring Walk (bed 33b), and at the bottom of the Palace Steps.

Information

Tabernaemontana is a genus of around 100 species found throughout the tropics, including one species in Australia. They belong to the Frangipani family - Apocynaceae. Many species are used in traditional medicine or shamanic ceremonial preparations. Scientists have been studying alkaloides found in many species of *Tabernaemontana*, and researching their potential medicinal applications. Although poisonous, the milky sap, leaves and flowers of these plants show potential for the pharmaceutical industry.

The Paper Gardenia although rarely grown as an ornamental is easy to grow in warm temperate to tropical climate zones. It requires full sun, well drained soil enriched with organic material, and benefits from a layer of surface mulch, 50 - 100 mm thick. Relatively slow growing and drought sensitive when young, it develops into a robust, disease free and resilient tree with age. Pruning is not required as it naturally forms an appealing dome shape with fragrant flowers held at the ends of the branches. Plants are available for purchase at our Growing Friends Nursery, 11am-2pm weekdays and 10am-2pm weekends.

