

■ Plant of the week: *The air plant Tillandsia duratii*

ONE of the main virtues for a gardener is patience.

Plants need to be planted while still young so they are able to grow in their permanent environment.

Some plants grow quickly (climbing plants, for example) but with some others you can barely see the difference from one year to another.

This *Tillandsia duratii* (right) is three years old. At first it needed a suitable spot and soil.

Tillandsias are air plants, meaning plants which live on trees without consuming their sap.

This plant is growing on a tree fern in the shade of a Parasol Pine and has exceptionally-sized flowers compared to its volume. As nour-



TILLANDSIA DURATII: It is easy to grow and only needs an occasional watering

ishment, the only thing that was provided for it was water from the atmosphere. It also gets water from the rare rainfalls and regular

spraying with tap water. If you would like to start growing Tillandsias, choose the species with light-coloured leaves at first

because they withstand the sun better.

It can grow on a balcony or apartment window sill and all it needs is some fresh water.

Photo: GDU

■ Questions and answers

Responsible shopkeepers

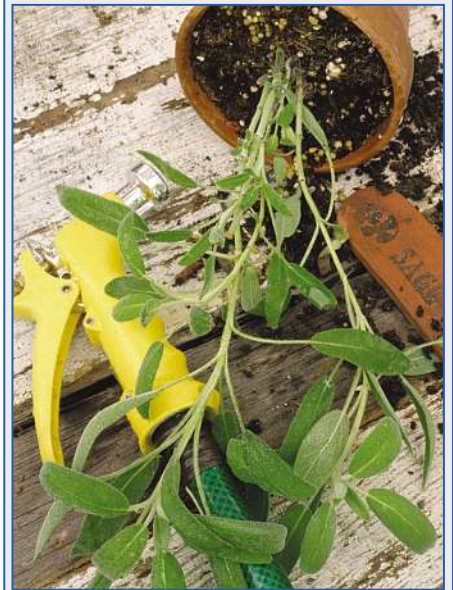
Q Your recent article about pesticides being put under lock and key by a gardening store does not mention its name. I think that nowadays, we should not hesitate to give the name of the courageous distributors who are aware of the problems. Nature and the users will thank you. It will not be disguised publicity because you often give the addresses of plant and seed producers.

A Botanic has led by example but other nurseries should follow soon. The very bad examples on the subject are the DIY outlets which pile up pesticides, often placed where children can reach them.

What high altitude balcony plants to use?

Q Hello, I live at an altitude of 1,300m in the Nice countryside and I do not know which plants to choose for my window boxes which face south. I would like flowers such as hortensias but is it possible? Can you give me the name of the flowers which I can grow?

A At this altitude and in a window box it is difficult to grow perennial plants. The alpine flora which grows at this time of year will be dormant in the summer and therefore you cannot count on it. Rather than growing seasonal plants like in the north of the country, you can kill two birds with one stone. Obtain some plant pots or small pots of Mediterranean plants such as plumbago, oleander, sage, the choice is vast. They will be very colourful until autumn. When the cold starts give them to some of your friends near the coast. Next year you can test new plants and offer them to other friends.



SAGE: A plant for high-altitude summer gardening

Antibes science garden celebrates its 150 years

A BOTANICAL garden in Cap d'Antibes celebrates its 150th birthday with a special open day this weekend.

The garden at Villa Thuret was created by scientist Gustave Thuret in 1857 to house a large collection of

trees from similar climates across the globe. It is now run by a French scientific body.

The open day is part of the national *Rendez-vous aux Jardins* festival whose theme this year is water - an important issue for the

centre. The garden's head of conservation Catherine Ducatillon said the collection of trees are an experiment to see which species can survive with very little of this precious resource. She said: "This part of the world doesn't get much

rainfall so it is important to find and develop species that can thrive without much water.

"Because the garden was developed with this in mind in the mid 19th century, much of the horticulture of the region is now a reflection of what was established right here. We are still working to that end - to identify and develop trees and plants that can survive in this climate and thus add to the region's diversity.

"Trees that grow here are only watered in the first few months to help them get established and then they are left to the elements, or lack of them.

"The result is a garden of great beauty but also of immense scientific importance for the region."

As part of the celebrations special tours, children's activities, an exhibition and workshops have been organised. The garden contains more than 2,500 trees and shrubs from at least 1,600 species.

Every year 200 new species are grown from seed and the plants grow freely in the garden with no chemical fertilisers or insecticides.

Open day programme:

■ Free guided tours (10.30, 14.30, 15.30 and 16.00)

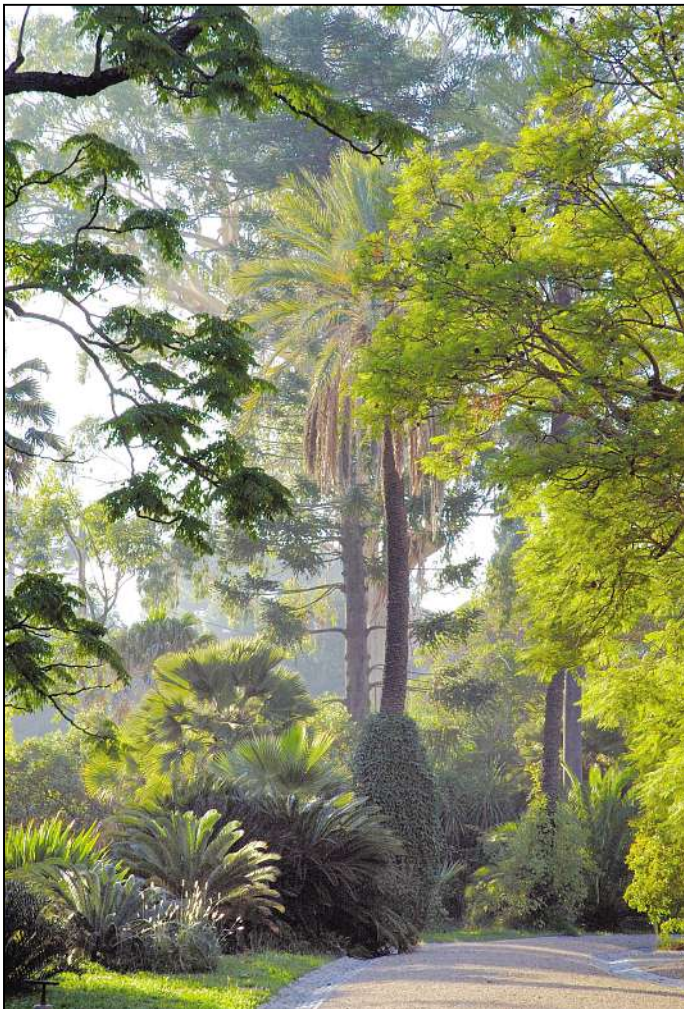
■ Educational activities for children

■ Workshops on a theme for adults: wood, bark

■ Exhibition of photos of the garden

■ The garden is open to the public every weekday except public holidays. Free individual visits and group tours by appointment. Possibility of visits on demand.

Website <http://jardin-thuret.antibes.inra.fr>
Tel: 04 97 21 25 03



SCIENCE: The garden's trees are watered at first then left to their own devices

My Cherry Laurel is not looking good

Q The person at the nursery who I showed a few leaves of my cherry laurel shrubs to explained that they are infected by powdery mildew. This person advised me to treat them with an insecticide and then a fungicide. In the first few days after the treatment the leaves curled in, dried up and fell (they are still falling off). However, now the young green leaves (spring shoots) are also infected. What should I do? Treat it again?

A Not being a salesperson I can talk to you frankly. Cherry laurels do not like the coastal climate very much and, in addition, in recently-built apartments, are often planted directly in the ground which is often a heap of rubble covered by a thin layer of soil. If maintained as a vertical hedge and nourished with chemical fertiliser this plant will not live long. Take the opportunity of the coming summer months to plant another hedge. If you really want a hedge using only one species (which I would not advise), choose a *Pittosporum* or a *Teucrium*. If not, you may combine the shrubs with flowers (oleanders, cestrum, abelia and so on) and you will have a hedge which is beautiful all year round. Change your nursery, the trainee who advised you to use an insecticide which is completely ineffective against this fatal disease should think about the state of our rivers and lungs rather than his turnover.