Stop 320 Adult Tour – Show House Overview

Take one breath of the fragrance-filled air in this greenhouse and you’re reminded just how indispensable “scent” is in the world of plants. Their natural ‘perfume’ fills our summer gardens with delight. And combined with flower color and shape, scent serves to attract bees, butterflies, moths, hummingbirds, or even bats to help with pollination. But not everything smells like a rose. Some plants are designed to attract carrion flies as their pollinators. Since the scent of those flowers is somewhat overpowering, we don’t include them in our collection here! For other plants like lavender or artemisia, their chemical scents can serve as repellents rather than attractants – protecting them from hungry herbivores.

In the center of this house a Southeast Asian tangerine tree competes for your attention with the fragrant olive tree — verbally here we need to make sure it is the “FRAGRANT OLIVE tree” rather than the “fragrant OLIVE TREE” — that flanks the doorway leading into the Fern House. Aromatic plants contain essential oils, which can be found in flower petals – as in roses and lilacs or in leaves such as eucalyptus or mint. When they’re stirred by a slight breeze or rubbed between our fingers, the oils are released and the air is infused with their smell.

Some essential oils are even found in the wood of certain trees. Rob: We have one tree, which is the camphor tree, cinnamomum camphora. This is known to a lot of people, particularly athletes, because the oil of camphor is derived from distilling the wood of this tree, and this is used in a number of liniments and ointments for muscle aches.” Many fragrant species have culinary or medicinal uses. Keep an eye out for the savory herb rosemary and the tropical plant ylang ylang - known for its calming effects.

Built in 1901, this greenhouse was originally used for teaching plant physiology. It became known as the Show House when it was transformed for twice-yearly flower shows. In the early 1970’s, we moved the spring bulb show and fall mum show to in the Physiology and Cold Storage greenhouses, permitting a year-round display of our fragrant plant collection here. But tradition prevails and we still call it the Show House.