



San Diego Zoo

Botanical Tours



Africa Rocks



Begin at the upper entrance to Africa Rocks garden, just past the Boardwalk Beer Garden. Continue down the path, ending at Cape Fynbos penguin habitat.



1. Lucky Bean Tree

Erythrina lysistemon

Found in a variety of African habitats, this deciduous tree's vibrant red flowers appear before its leaves emerge in early spring. It offers food and shelter for many birds, insects, and mammals.

Fun Fact

The common name "lucky bean" comes from the fact that people place the bright red seeds in their pockets for good luck.



2. Baobab Tree

Adansonia madagascariensis

This is one of six species of baobab in Madagascar. It belongs to the hibiscus family, *Malvaceae*, and is typically found in the dry forests of northern Madagascar. Baobab trees have unusually thick trunks (referred to as pachycauls) and are long-lived—some recorded to be over 1,000 years old.

Fun Fact

The large flowers of baobabs are pollinated by bats, hawk moths, bees, birds, and lemurs. Baboons, elephants, chimpanzees, and elands are common dispersers of the sweet-tasting seeds.



3. Hildebrandt's Moringa

Moringa hildebrandtii

This impressive deciduous tree is endemic to Madagascar and is critically endangered in the wild. Its trunk resembles the baobab tree, but the leaves look different. Moringa leaves are bipinnately compound—divided into leaflets twice.

Fun Fact

The first collection of Hildebrandt's moringa was made by botanist Johannes Hildebrandt in 1880. Some species of *Moringa* are cultivated for their nutritional value.



4. Colville's Glory

Colvillea racemosa

This species is endemic to Madagascar, occurring in four subpopulations in the southern, western, and northern dry forests of the island. Deciduous and able to grow to 60 feet tall, it is thought to be pollinated by sunbirds. It is under threat due to habitat loss and fragmentation of populations.

Fun Fact

This species has not been reported to bloom in Southern California, perhaps because of a lack of sustained heat in the summer.



5. Mazari Palm

Nannorrhops ritchieana

While not native to the continent of Africa, this palm does occur in what is called the African floristic province, which includes arid regions of the Arabian Peninsula into Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. It is a clumping, branching palm that reaches 20 feet tall and 30 feet wide.

Fun Fact

This palm is very drought tolerant and well adapted to desert conditions of extreme hot and cold. It displays large white inflorescences up to six feet long.



6. Flat Top Acacia

Vachellia abyssinica

This wide-spreading evergreen reaches heights of 50 feet in its native range of Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. The seeds have a hard coating that repels water. In nature, erosion forces or a pass through an animal's digestive system breaks the seal. Humans rub them with sandpaper or soak in hot water before sowing.

Fun Fact

All acacias have a symbiotic relationship with certain soil bacteria that form root nodules and fix atmospheric nitrogen—providing nutrients to the tree and nearby plants.



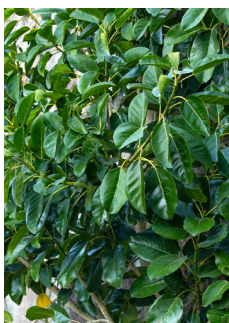
7. Ethiopian Acanthus

Acanthus sennii

This unusual plant is native to the Ethiopian Highlands, and produces a brilliant flame-like bloom spike. The glossy-green leaves are sharply armed, helping to defend the plant against herbivores.

Fun Fact

In the Ethiopian Highlands, it naturally occurs in Juniperus-Podocarpus forests and rocky grasslands. Often, people in the region use it as a hedge, protecting home gardens.



8. Bubu Fig

Ficus bubu

Found from the Ivory Coast to South Africa, it grows in a wide geographic and habitat range. This species of *Ficus* produces fruit along the branches and trunks, a trait known as cauliflory. The trunk of the bubu fig has a distinct yellow hue and extremely glossy semi-deciduous leaves.

Fun Fact

Ficus are often “keystone species” that are essential to the health of their ecosystem by providing food, shelter, and habitat for other wildlife.



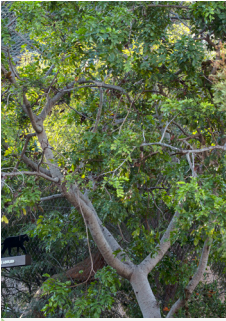
9. Leopard Orchid

Ansellia africana

This large species of orchid can be found growing in the branches of trees, or on the ground after the weight of the plant has caused the branch to break. The flowers of this species can be quite variable in size and characteristic.

Fun Fact

Many leopard orchids are pale yellow, with dark brown or black blotches, making their overall look reminiscent of a leopard cat's coloration.



10. Weeping Boer-bean

Schotia brachypetala

Red blossoms appear over a long blooming season, providing large quantities of nectar for many pollinator animals. The copious nectar drips from the flowers, hence the common name “weeping boer-bean.” This can be a striking landscape tree in Mediterranean climates, with its wide-spreading, rounded canopy.

Fun Fact

The bright yellow arils (a small outgrowth of the seed) of this tree attracts monkeys and birds to the seeds to assist in dispersal.



11. Madagascar Ocotillo

Alluaudia procera

This succulent species is found in the spiny thicket forests of southwest Madagascar. Although it shares a resemblance to (and common name with) the ocotillos native to the Southwest United States, they are not related and belong to two different botanical families.

Fun Fact

Despite the plant’s daunting spines, sifaka lemurs easily jump from branch to branch, eating the succulent leaves.



12. Sandpaper Fig

Ficus exasperata

This tree is native to tropical and subtropical forests of Africa and southern Asia. Since soils are shallow and nutrient poor in these regions, this tree produces buttress roots which function as anchors, collect leaf litter for nutrients and absorb oxygen from the atmosphere.

Fun Fact

As the common name suggests, the leaves are so coarse, they could be used as sandpaper!



13. White Gardenia

Gardenia thunbergia

This beautiful and fragrant plant is from the forests of South Africa. After moths pollinate the flowers, a hard, woody fruit forms that may remain on the shrub for years. Big herbivores like elephants and buffalo eat the fruit, and disperse the seeds through their dung.

Fun Fact

California condors at the San Diego Zoo were able to open the tough fruits and free the seeds, which fell to the ground and germinated. The seedlings were then dug and planted in Africa Rocks—condor assisted plant propagation!



14. Snowflake Euphorbia

Euphorbia polygona

This clumping, spiny spurge comes from South Africa. The similarities between the cacti found in the Americas and the euphorbias of Africa are an example of convergent evolution.

Fun Fact

Convergent evolution is a process where unrelated species evolve similar characteristics. Cacti and African euphorbias look very similar because they both are adapted to grow in hot, arid conditions.



15. Willowmore Cypress

Widdringtonia schwarzii

This species is found in the Baviaanskloof and Kouga Mountains in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The cones of this gymnosperm remain on the tree for nearly three years before seeds are released.

Fun Fact

The trees of this species in Africa Rocks were germinated from seed of a mother tree in our collection. The seeds required a smoke treatment to germinate, mimicking the fire ecology in its native region.

