

# THE LEAFLET

November 2014

The Monthly Magazine of the Vallarta Botanical Garden Vol. 4, No 11



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The Monthly Magazine of the Vallarta Botanical Garden

Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, México



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## Curator's Corner

*Dear Friends of the Garden,*

Each winter ancient civilizations, including those of the Aztecs and Mayas, prayed for the sun to return from its steady and ominous decent in the horizon and to once again come back with increasing daylight, heat, and growing hours for their all-important crops. It seems that the end of summer brings on a different prayer to those of us who spend the year in Puerto Vallarta. Technically, the last week of September may be the fall equinox, but the intense heat and humidity that provides our forests with their exuberant green vegetation and wondrous botanical delights, lingers well into October. But just as the Aztec sun came back without fail each year, our heat and humidity drifted away in the wind once again bringing back the dreamlike climate of a new Puerto Vallarta fall and winter season.

As the ancients marked their calendars upon the solstice, we in Vallarta mark our calendars with events to welcome back our friends from around the world as well as new visitors to our beloved Bay of Banderas and its beaches, mountains, and forests that surround it with an immense embrace. We hope your calendars are already marked with your next visit to the Garden whether to join us for events or activities or to just spend a quiet day here with friends, family or even on your own. To those of you too far to visit soon, keep Mexico in your hearts — you are certainly in ours!

*From the Garden,*

*Bob Price, Curator and Founder*



“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.”

— Ecclesiastes 3:1

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## Mexico—Birthplace of the Pumpkin

By Neil Gerlowski, Executive Director, VBG



Pumpkins feature so prominently in the traditional autumnal cuisine, literature, and legend of the US that many erroneously assume it to be a native plant to that country. Any good botanist should be quick to point out though that millennia before the first pumpkin pie accompanied any Thanksgiving feast, pumpkins have served as a staple food in Mexico and a quintessential symbol of the change of seasons here. The first domesticated pumpkin seeds were discovered in ancient Oaxacan tombs dating back to 7000 BCE, their use in burial denoting a high degree of cultural importance. Pumpkin fruit, seeds, oil, and even flowers are still extensively used today in Mexican cuisine.

The pumpkin's spooky side was also recognized by ancient Mexican cultures. Centuries before Washington Irving's 1820 American classic "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (in which a shattered pumpkin marked the mysterious disappearance of Ichabod Crane after a run-in with the Headless Horseman) Aztecs featured pumpkin pulp in their fall-time rituals which are now celebrated as "The Day of the Dead."

Mexican pumpkins occur in a dramatic range of colors beyond the stereotypical orange and can be harvested from a dark green to yellow, red, pink, and white. Botanically, pumpkins are fruits belong to the curcubitaceae family along with cucumbers, melons, squash and gourds—all originating in the Americas—though widely introduced throughout the world. Don't let their names in other countries fool you either: an "Italian" zucchini, introduced to the Apennine Peninsula only a few hundred years ago, has been known as *calabacita* in Mexico since the Spanish Conquest and by various indigenous names since time immemorial.

Whether you celebrate this fall with pumpkin pie or *quesadillas* filled with *flor de calabaza* (pumpkin flowers), remember to give a nod to Mexico for yet another gift to the taste buds of people all over the world.



"I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself  
than be crowded on a velvet cushion."

— Henry David Thoreau

## Garden Entry Fee Increase

*By Neil Gerlowski, Executive Director, VBG*

The Vallarta Botanical Garden is committed to providing a world-class botanical visitor experience while advancing its initiatives in conservation, research, and environmental education. We also continue to offer access at an affordable cost to the local public and provide complimentary visits to school children (over 2,000 in 2013). Amazingly this is all done without any direct government support. We rely on the generous patronage and contributions of visitors, members and donors to make this all happen. As inflation and costs of doing business increase, we must in turn assess our pricing structure and occasionally modify it accordingly.

This past month the Garden's Board of Directors approved an entry fee increase for the first time in four years from 60 pesos per person to 80 pesos per person beginning on December 14th. While infants will still be admitted without charge, an entry fee of 20 pesos per child age 4-12 will also be introduced.

We are working hard to ensure that our labor in horticulture, plant display, landscaping, interpretation, and guest service more than warrants the modest increase in entry. In our effort to provide a great public benefit to locals, we are also increasing the total complimentary visits by receiving more schoolchild for the 2014-2015 academic year. We're also working with educators to transform these visits from "field trips" to true "field studies" with in-class introductions of terms and concepts followed by focused activities here at the Garden with measurable learning objectives.

<b>"TOP 10 Gardens in North America Worth Traveling For" as declared by the Garden Tourism Conference in 2013</b>			
Garden	Location	Adult Admission Rates	
		USD/CAN	MXN
Atlanta Botanical Garden	Atlanta, GA, USA	18.95	~250
The Butchart Gardens	Victoria, BC, CAN	30.20	~400
Chanticleer Garden	Wayne, PA, USA	10.00	~130
Filoli	Woodside, CA, USA	15.00	~200
Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden	Richmond, VA, USA	11.00	~145
Missouri Botanical Garden	St Louis, MO, USA	8.00	~105
Montreal Botanical Garden	Montreal, QC, CAN	18.75	~245
Portland Japanese Garden	Portland, OR, USA	9.50	~125
Springs Preserve	Las Vegas, NV, USA	18.95	~250
Vallarta Botanical Garden	Puerto Vallarta, JAL, MX	~6.15	80
Average Adult Admission Rate:		14.65	~190
Note: Conversion rate used: 13 MXN = 1 USD/CAN ~ = approximate conversion from USD/CAN to MXN or vice versa.			

Our 2013 inclusion in the list of the "TOP 10 Gardens in North America Worth Traveling For" by the Canadian Garden Tourism Conference confirmed what we had already known to be true: a visit to the Vallarta Botanical Garden is a world-class experience. Crunching the numbers, we confirmed a hunch that until then we couldn't easily quantify: with an entry fee of only 80 pesos per person, a visit to the VBG is an unparalleled value. We continue to add new features to the Garden increasing its value to our visitors. This is perhaps best evidenced by our

new Vallarta Conservatory of Mexican Orchids which prompted our 2014 award of "Initiative of the Year Award" by the International Garden Tourism Council during the Gardens Without Limits Conference in Metz, France.

There's still plenty of time to visit us before the fee increase including our entire week-long celebration of the Grand Opening of the Vallarta Conservatory of Mexican Orchids (December 6th-13<sup>th</sup>). Also, for those to whom 80 pesos presents too great of a challenge, we are announcing 50% off the entry fee for the months of May and September, specifically offered with our local friends of Cabo Corrientes, Puerto Vallarta, and Bahia de Banderas in mind.

Paying your entry fee makes a big difference! Purchasing a membership creates an even bigger impact and welcomes you to a very special family of Garden supporters. It also provides a great savings for those who visit the Garden often. Many thanks for your support and patronage.





“I cannot endure to waste anything so precious as autumnal sunshine by staying in the house.”

— Nathaniel Hawthorne

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## From the Membership Desk

New discoveries await you at the Garden with every visit. Garden members have unlimited access to their favorite plants, trails, exhibits, swimming holes in the Rio Horcones, or just the chance to relax in the green and flower-filled paradise we are surrounded by. Membership rates are unchanged by the new entry fee increase and remain a wonderful option to both receive valuable benefits and support the work that we do within our grounds and beyond in the community and our local forests.

To upgrade a current membership, renew, join us for the very first time, or just say hi, please visit with me at the Garden soon or visit our member page online [www.vbgardens.org/memberships](http://www.vbgardens.org/memberships).

Thank you for your support!

**Michaela Flores**  
**Membership Coordinator**  
[memberships@vbgardens.org](mailto:memberships@vbgardens.org)



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## The Vallarta Conservatory of Mexican Orchids – Grand Opening Week!

Construction is complete on the new Vallarta Conservatory of Mexican Orchids! Public access to this new facility is now available even while we are adding displays, plants, and interpretive signage in preparation for our Grand Opening. Originally scheduled for December 13th, 2014, we've now programmed a whole week of **Grand Opening Celebration** activities from **December 6th through the 13th**. Please mark your calendars accordingly!

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*“¿Que sigue pagando el otoño con tanto dinero amarillo?”*

“What does autumn continue to pay for with so much yellow money?”

— Pablo Neruda





## Mexican Orchid of the Month – *Sobralia decora*

So many of the Puerto Vallarta region's native orchids occur as epiphytes that those naturally occurring in other forms are a wonderful exception. *Sobralia decora* is most commonly encountered as a reedy terrestrial in large clumps sometimes over a meter in height. Its flowers, beyond their graceful beauty, are admired for their delightful cinnamon scent. *Sobralia decora* is remarkably easy to grow and is a top choice native plant for one still working on their green thumb. Just plant it in loose *tezontle* (volcanic rock) or other such rapidly-draining medium. The Garden has plenty of *Sobralia decora*s on display, especially in the new conservatory, and you can find some available in our nursery to bring back to your own tropical garden or even a condo patio.

### Tropical Plants and Walks of Puerto Vallarta



Including a Walking Guide of the  
Vallarta Botanical Garden

2nd Edition

by Sandra Cesca  
with Robert Price

The second edition of the popular guide book "***Tropical Plants and Walks of Puerto Vallarta***" is now available in the Garden's gift shop. The expanded new 120 page edition includes more plant photos and descriptions and an expanded section on the Vallarta Botanical Garden.

Sandra also leads several different walks throughout the Vallarta region including a new walk of nearby historic El Tuito. For more information, visit [www.escaperoutevallarta.com](http://www.escaperoutevallarta.com) or write to: [sandra.learn.vallarta@gmail.com](mailto:sandra.learn.vallarta@gmail.com).



## Mexican Bird of the Month — Mexican Yellow Grosbeak

The Mexican yellow grosbeak (*Pheucticus chrysopheplus*) occurs along Mexico's Pacific slope from Sonora all the way south to Chiapas with its range just dipping into Guatemala. Occasionally vagrants are reported to be observed in the southwestern-most states of the US. The striking yellow, black, and white colors of the male normally make its field identification quite easy. The females have more subdued colors with olive upperparts, gray in place of black on the wing, and smaller white markings. Even so, the proportionally very large beak of this species can help give it away.

Many thanks to Petr Myska of [VivaNatura](#) for his image of the Mexican yellow grosbeak. The second edition of his "Field Guide to the Amphibians, Reptiles, Birds and Mammals of Western Mexico" is now on sale at the Vallarta Botanical Garden for \$320 pesos, or \$288 pesos with a member discount.

The Garden is a popular birding hotspot year-round. Binoculars can be rented (only 70 pesos per pair for up to four hours) if you don't have your own. Organized school groups receive complimentary use of the binoculars, guided birding tours, and more with advanced reservations.



## Breakfast with the Birds — Available Everyday at the Garden



### Included

- Garden Entry
- Binocular Rental
- Garden Birding Checklist
- Breakfast w/ coffee or juice

**Just \$280 MXN / person**

## VBG Education & Volunteer Program Report

*By Linda Asencio, Biologist and Environmental Educator*

*Peace Corps Volunteer at the Vallarta Botanical Garden through a collaboration with Mexico's Park Service (CONANP)*

While we're welcoming back many so-called "snowbirds" traveling to Vallarta by plane, car, or otherwise, the real feathered snowbirds are also arriving in droves. This past month we reached nearly 200 total participants in celebration of "[International Migratory Bird Day](#)." And why would a botanical Garden be so concerned about birds? First off, avian life provides crucial environmental services that plants depend on: pollination, insect control, small mammal control, seed dispersal, and much more. Beyond this, the beauty and activity of birds along with the challenge of observing many rare and more secretive species makes birding a fascinating pastime. People who appreciate birds are much more likely to care for critical habitat such as our forests, much of which is now at risk.



The Garden's October birding events included a presentation to biology students at the University of Guadalajara's Puerto Vallarta Campus (UDG-CUC), a field study at the Garden for students from the Puerto Vallarta Regional Preparatory School, birding participants at the Garden on October 11th including several visitors from the UDG-CUC and the [Estero el Salado](#) and visits to six separate El Tuito classrooms. Many thanks to Alejandro Martinez Rodriguez of [Birding in Mexico](#) and all of the other volunteers who helped make these events such a success. Also, we send our thanks to International

Migratory Bird Day for providing us with educational materials for our participants. Most of all, a round of applause to all those who participated and join our ranks of conservation-minded observers of the natural world. Together we can work to protect the amazing natural resources of the Vallarta region.

Interested in volunteering with us? Please join our volunteer training on November 29th (details on page 10).

### **Monthly tally of visits, program participation, and volunteer service:**

Oct. 2014	Total member visits to the VBG:	146
	Total non-member visits to the VBG:	1491
	Complimentary entries for organized school groups*:	42
	Total participation in daily 1 pm tours:	17
	Total participation in special events, classes, or workshops:	472
	Total volunteer service hours:	273

\*The VBG is happy to provide complimentary entries, guided tours, and educational programming for organized school groups with advanced reservations as one of our services to the Bahía de Banderas, Puerto Vallarta, and Cabo Corrientes communities. Reservation requests should be sent to [educadorambiental@vbgardens.org](mailto:educadorambiental@vbgardens.org) at least 5 days before the requested date of your visit. Requests are granted first come, first served and are scheduled around other events and programs already on our [calendar](#).



## 9th Anniversary of the Vallarta Botanical Garden November 15



Those of you who visited the Gardens back in 2005 have seen plenty of change over the nine years since we've been open to the public. Whether you visit us for the first time or the 999th, please stop in for a complimentary slice of birthday cake (served at 2 pm) to wish the Garden a happy 9th year.

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## House Hunters International Benefit Screening November 24



The Vallarta Botanical Garden was recently featured in an episode of HGTV's "House Hunters International" and our organization has been selected as one of the four beneficiaries to share the proceeds of the upcoming screening and charity event on Monday, November 24, at the new Mantamar Beach Club (located on Los Muertos Beach). Hosted by Timothy Real Estate Group, the party theme this year is "Gilligan's Island" and the Garden's Founder and Curator, Robert Price, has agreed to dress the part of Thurston Howell III, "The Millionaire."

Pre-sale tickets for the event are now available at the Gardens for just \$300 pesos (down from \$350 pesos at the door) and include event cover, appetizers, and a tropical welcome drink. In addition to the viewing of the new "House Hunters International" episode, re-runs from the older PV episodes will be playing and some of our favorite Vallarta friends will be decked out as ringers from the old "Gilligan's Island."

For more info, visit the ["House Hunters International" charity fundraiser Facebook page](#) or [download the poster](#).

## Thanksgiving Dinner (US) November 27



The Vallarta Botanical Garden has become a popular destination tradition for north of the border friends visiting or living in our tropical paradise of a region. The cool mountain air at the Garden and the aroma of smoke from our brick oven evokes a sense of holiday nostalgia. Our special event menu is posted at [www.vbgardens.org/thanks-us](http://www.vbgardens.org/thanks-us).

### Vallarta Botanical Garden's Upcoming Events & Special Dates

Date			Cost
15	NOV	<b>Garden's 9th Anniversary</b> – Celebration at 2 pm includes a complementary slice of cake	Included with entry
20	NOV	<b>Revolution Day (Mexico)</b> – all day (Garden remains open)	Included with entry
24	NOV	<b>House Hunters International Screening Event</b> – 7 pm at Mantamar Beach Club	350 MXN
27	NOV	<b>Thanksgiving (US)</b> – all day; restaurant special served 12 – 5 pm	<a href="#">See menu</a>
29	NOV	<b>Volunteer Training</b> – 10:30am -2:00 pm (Optional activities start at 8 am) Registration by NOV. 27 required: <a href="mailto:educadorambiental@vbgardens.org">educadorambiental@vbgardens.org</a>	Free, <a href="#">but requires registration</a>
6-13	DEC	<b>Grand Opening Festival for the Vallarta Conservatory of Mexican Orchids</b>	Included with entry
14	DEC	<b>Crash Course on Birding in Tropical Western Mexico</b>	Included with entry
15	DEC	<b>Christmas Bird Count</b>	Included with entry

\* Some activities subject to change. The most current calendar, often with links to further event information can be viewed at [www.vbgardens.org/calendar](http://www.vbgardens.org/calendar).



## Garden Hours 10 am – 6 pm

**Open 7 days/wk** for the months of Dec., Jan., Feb., & March (except Christmas & New Year's Day)

**Open 6 days/wk** (**Closed Mondays**) April, May, June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., & Nov

**Early "Bird" Opening:** 8 am every Thursday

**Daily Guided Tour:** 1 pm (Offered for the months of Dec., Jan., Feb., & March)

**Additional tours** can be reserved in advance [www.vbgardens.org/tours](http://www.vbgardens.org/tours)

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## Amenities & Services

Visit the Gardens' Hacienda de Oro Restaurant for authentic Mexican food and brick-oven pizza. Our new menu includes delicious dishes such as fish and shrimp tacos. Hike the Gardens' nature trails and bask in tropical mountain scenery. Experience the Holstein Tropical Plant House, Tillandsia House, Vallarta Conservatory of Mexican Orchids (recently dedicated and scheduled for a Grand Opening Celebration December 6-13th), Gift Shop, plant nursery and much more. The very best of Vallarta!

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## Can you find your name on our WALL OF BENEFACTORS?

A high resolution image of this photograph is available at [www.vbgardens.org/benefactors](http://www.vbgardens.org/benefactors)

**If you're not yet "on the wall" we invite you to  
join  
the family that preserves the Garden forever!**

Becoming a member is easy & provides great benefits:  
[www.vbgardens.org/memberships](http://www.vbgardens.org/memberships)



**We would like to acknowledge and thank the following supporters:**

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