



TRENDING

Oh, to Stop and Smell the Local Flora

BOTANISTS AND HORTICULTURISTS are being hired by hotels to help their gardens grow, with an increasing focus on indigenous flora.

Ellerman House, in Cape Town, celebrates everything South African, including wines and art. It transformed its English rose garden to feature local wildflowers found on the slopes of Table Mountain. The result is a wraparound 1.5-acre garden including white pixie, aurora and Mandela's gold (a local variation on the bird of paradise). "The garden is very water-wise," said Ellerman's resort operations manager, MJ Birch, who added that, because the plants are native, the flowers draw most of their water naturally and that the need to irrigate has decreased by nearly 80 percent.

At Bacara Resort and Spa in Santa Barbara, Calif., a recently completed 1.4-mile self-guided walking trail is filled with local trees and other plants. The plants bear Native American name plaques and are not only indigenous, but also functional, used for food, medicine, art and religious purposes, like toyon (used for hardwood) and coyote brush (for poison oak rash). "Since these species are local, they thrive with minimal supervision," said Timara Lotah Link, a member of the indigenous Chumash people who teaches about their culture. Because of the California drought, she said, more



COURTESY OF ELLERMAN HOUSE

Indigenous plants in the gardens at Ellerman House, a hotel in Cape Town.

people are growing local flora, since the plants are hardier.

JW Marriott Scottsdale Camelback Inn Resort and Spa in Arizona has a full-time on-site horticulturist, Vanessa Cohorn-Brown, who supervises desert plant life, like golden barrel cactus, saguaro and red bird of paradise. At Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa in Texas, Jonathan Pixler, its horticulturist, cultivates mature pecan trees, Indian paint brush, Texas mountain laurel and yaupon holly, whose red berries draw birds in the fall.

Native landscaping also helps restore and attract local wildlife, according to Norma Rodriguez, the biologist at the Grand Residences in Riviera Maya, Mexico. The hotel has 2.7 acres devoted to local plants, including white and Botoncillo mangrove trees, along with spider lilies and sea grapes. Because of the decision to restore local plants, "birds such as herons, ibis, kingfishers, anhingas and cormorants and migratory species such as ducks are now starting to call this area home," she said. *CHARU SURI*

