

HOME & GARDEN    JANUARY 2019

## THE MUSIC OF THE NIGHT

The Gables Gardener

### BLOOMING PLANTS FOR THE NIGHT OWL GARDENER

Want to enjoy the rewards of your garden toil after the sun sets? Then choose plants that bloom at night, offering lovely flowers or a heady scent.

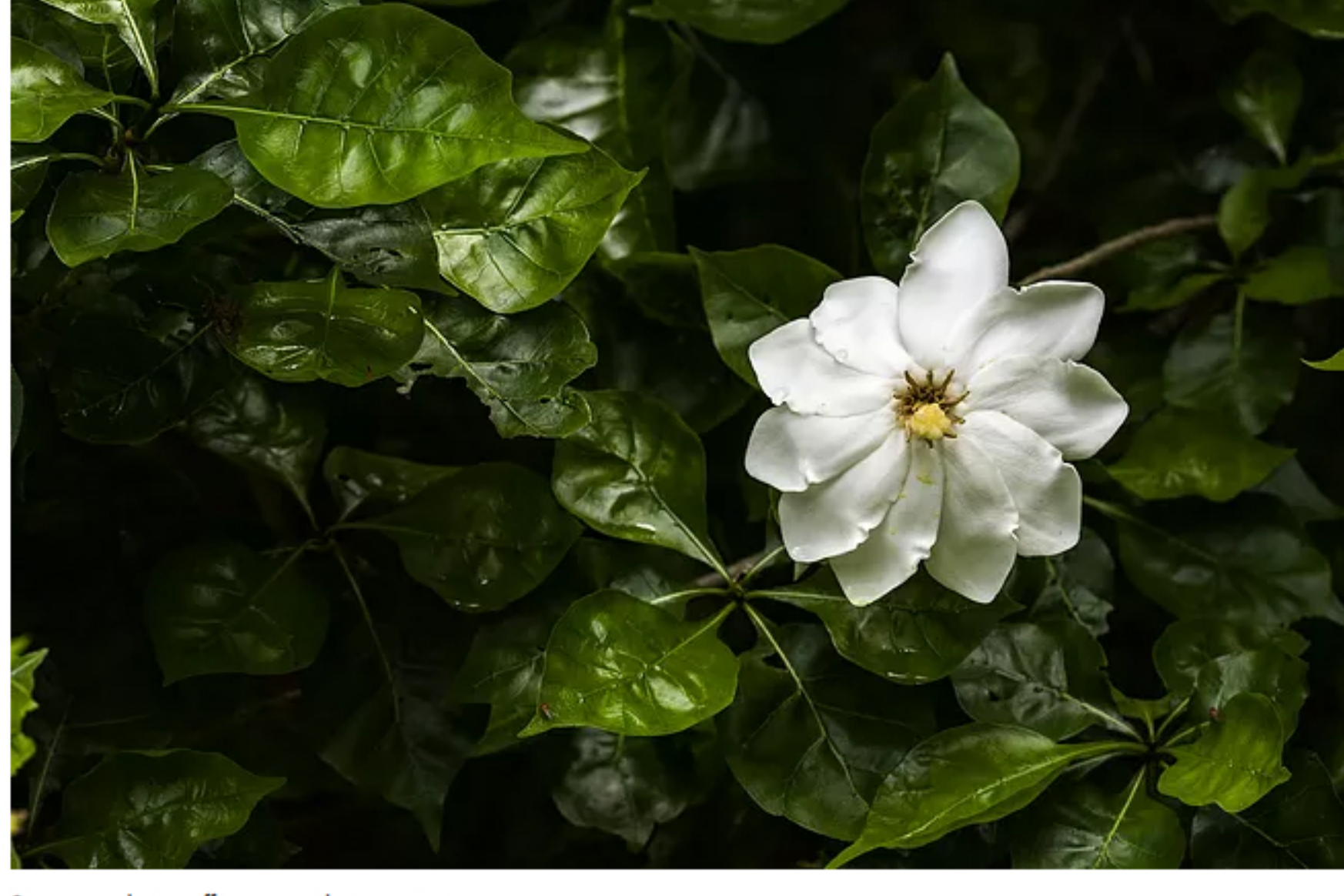
Many night-blooming plants have developed relationships with, not surprisingly, nocturnal animals like moths, bats, certain beetles and lemurs, so you might also catch a glimpse of these animals at work—though in South Florida, the lemurs probably won't show up.

Most of the following plants aren't obligate night bloomers, but their flowers may smell more intensely after dark. Some, however, open only at night, and can be called vespertine—my new favorite word—meaning active after dark.



Tahitian gardenia was made for tropical nights

The Tahitian gardenia (*Gardenia taitensis*) is a relatively small, bushy plant that isn't actually native to Tahiti, but from further west, in Melanesia. It flowers in daylight, but fragrance increases at night, and the large white pinwheel flowers attract night-flying moths with their nectar. Gardenias don't love our high pH alkaline soil, so if you notice foliage turning yellow, try an iron-based additive designed to increase soil acidity. Follow up with fertilizer for plants that like acidic soil, as per label directions.



Starry gardenia offers a gardenia variation.

There are loads of other gardenias we can grow here. If you stroll down the Allée at Fairchild, near the end in Plot 24 is starry gardenia (*Gardenia thunbergia*). Native to southern Africa, the starry gardenia also produces a pinwheel-shaped white flower; these flowers also offer long tubes accessible only to nocturnal hawkmoths.



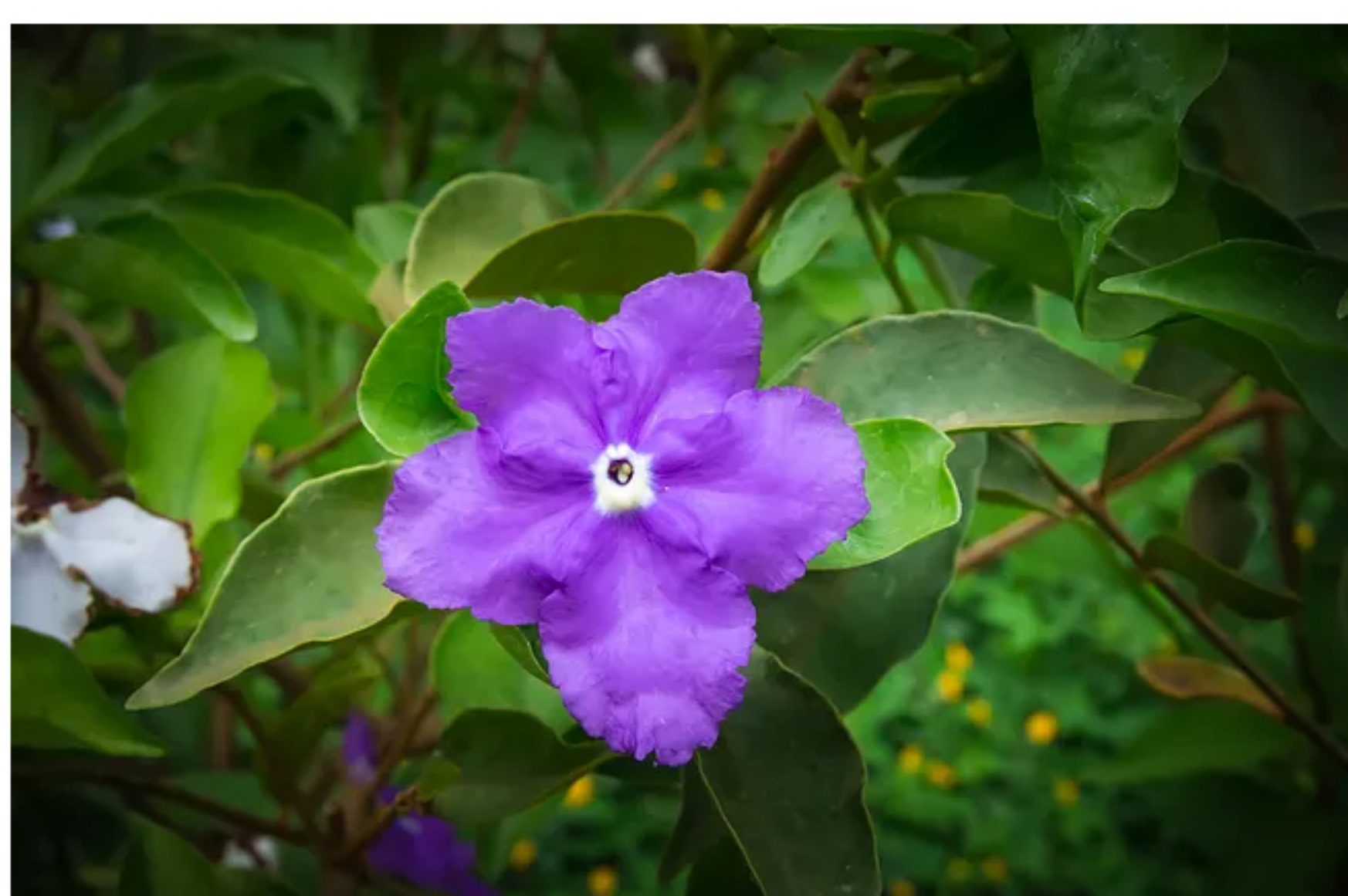
Plumeria perfume the night and are available in far more variety than are commonly planted.

*Plumeria* (or frangipanni) are iconic of Hawaii, though the plant is native to Central and South America. *Plumeria* flowers are open during the day, but are most fragrant at night in order to lure sphinx moths to pollinate them. The poor moths are fooled, as *Plumeria* flowers provide no nectar. Nevertheless, the moths spread its pollen. Varieties are available in flowers of whites, yellows, pinks, reds and combinations of these. *Plumeria* prefers seasonally drier conditions, so don't overirrigate, especially before or while they are blooming. Fairchild has about 20 *Plumeria* varieties planted throughout the Garden.



Peach colored Brugmansia, or angel's trumpet

*Brugmansia*, angels' trumpets, are intensely fragrant at night. These aren't strictly night-blooming, but often will come daytime heat. *Brugmansia* can be found in various shades of pink, yellow, peach, apricot, cream and yellow, with flowers forming large, pendant trumpets.



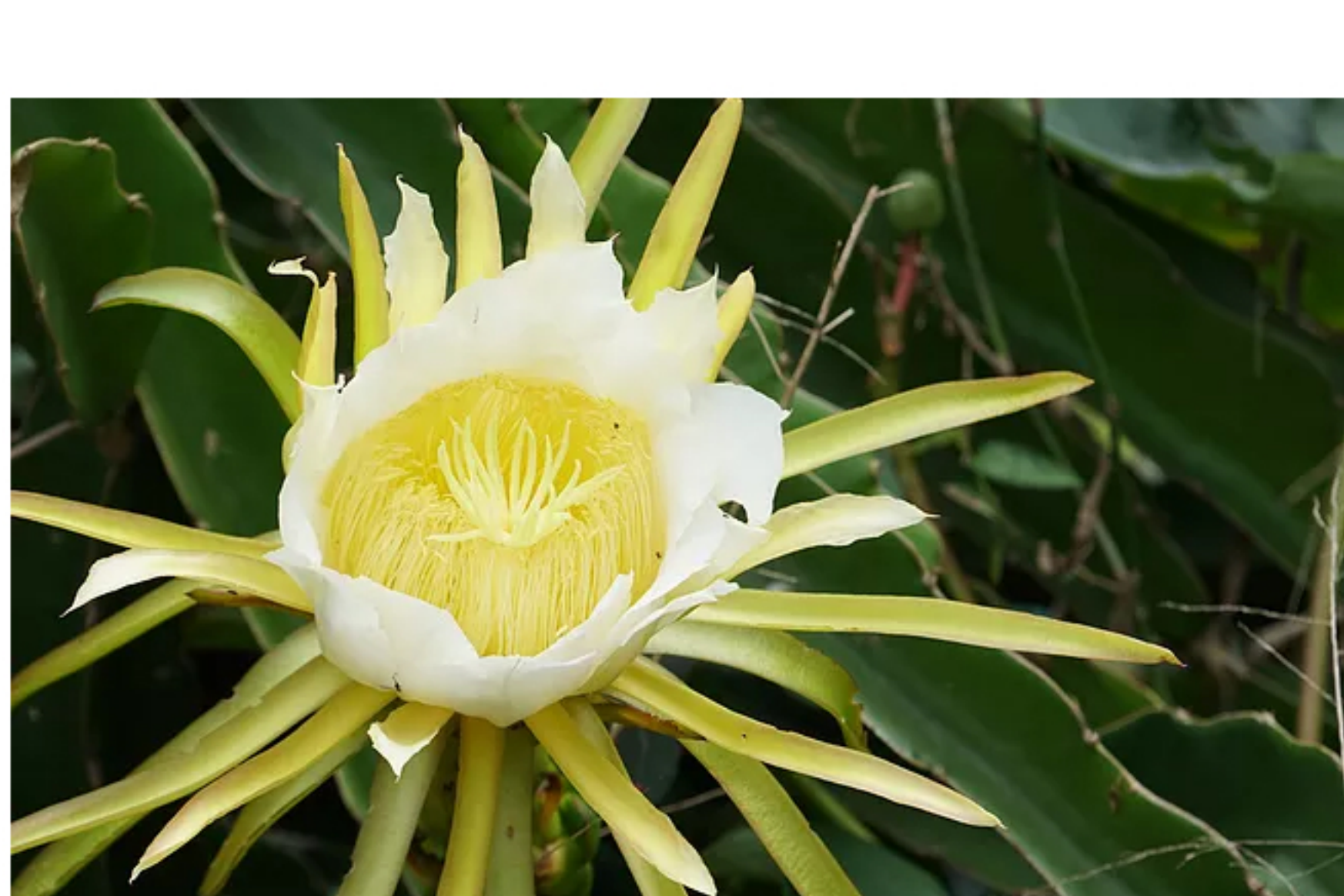
Brunfelsia americana provides an evening scent

There are a number of *Brunfelsia* species from tropical America. Two in particular—*Brunfelsia americana* and *B. nitida*—are both called lady of the night for good reason: their scent wafts with the pulses of evening warmth. The more familiar yesterday-today-tomorrow plant, *Brunfelsia grandiflora*, is in the same genus, and while providing evening scent is also more alkaline-soil tolerant.



The night blooming jasmine is actually not a jasmine

Night-blooming jasmine, *Cestrum nocturnum*, is not an actual jasmine. But its narrow, trumpet-shaped flowers tipped with star-like petals are known to perfume the night. *Cestrum* is also known as potentially invasive.



The flower of the night-blooming cactus looks like an egg

A plant that blooms strictly at night is *Hylocereus undatus*, a night-blooming cactus also known as dragonfruit or pitaya. The flowers resemble fried eggs, with white petals and yellow center. They may not smell sweet, but are glorious and worth staying up late to see; by morning, they will be gone. This sprawling, climbing cactus needs a firm hand to stop it taking over.



The odd sausage tree flowers at night only

Look around South Florida and you may start noticing how many Sausage trees (*Kigelia africana*) there are, with fruit like giant sausages or loaves of Cuban bread. It is native throughout large areas of east Africa, and its fruit can grow to two feet long and weigh up to 15 pounds. It is worthwhile to trek out to see its night-blooming flowers, which are as unusual as the sausageshaped fruit: large red-maroon and dangling from what's called a panicle. Although they may stay open for some of the day, their scent is strongest at night to attract their primary pollinators—bats.

There are so many more plants that seem to come alive after dark. I have had to omit many, but I encourage you to research the topic when planning your garden, particularly areas you may frequent in the magic hours after the sun goes down.

Kenneth Setzer is a writer for Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden