

Geelong Botanic Gardens, Plant of the Month, 18th March, 2013

Family: Solanaceae
Genus Brugmansia
Species Candida
Common name: Angels trumpet

Brugmansia candida in the GBG is found in the 19th century garden, on the opposite side to the Friends' meeting room.

B. candida was originally from Columbia and Ecuador where it is very common. It was mainly found between 1500-2000 m.

It is closely related to *daturas*, the main difference being the spines on the fruit of the *datura*, which the *Brugmansia* do not have.

B. candida is a semi-woody, 2–3m high, ornamental shrub with long trumpet-shaped white flowers that have a strong sweet fragrance, particularly at night. The flowers may be single, double, or more. The fruits are smooth, narrow cylindrical pods, pointed at the end, the leaves dull green and softly hairy, 10–30cm long, with wavy margins.

B. candida can only be propagated through cuttings, though propagation is simple, just place the cutting in the ground and water.



Photo by Mary Loudon

All parts of *B. Candida* are highly toxic. It contains tropane alkaloids, mainly scopolamine. Symptoms may include intense thirst, difficulty with speech, breathing and swallowing, vomiting and diarrhoea, fever, confusion, hallucinations, delirium, dilated pupils, seizures and coma. Deaths have occurred. The perfume can cause respiratory irritation, headaches, nausea, and light-headedness. Eye contact with the sap may cause dilated pupils and temporary blindness.

Traditional uses

In Colombia leaf extracts were used for ceremonial divination, prophecy and healing. It was only used for divinations in very serious cases, as it causes the shaman who works with it to go into a coma for around three days!

In Mexico it is used for divination and the diagnosis of illness. Three flowers are macerated in hot water, then pressed with a cloth. The Tzeltal smoke the dried leaves blended with tobacco or other herbs for divination purposes and in Peru leaves and flowers make a potent psychoactive drink.

In Colombia, *B. candida* is prepared as a plaster for tumors, swelling, swollen joints, muscle cramps, inflammation, and colds.