

SPRING 2022 WALK FROM THE UPPER CAR PARK



There is a downloadable version of the walk on our website (<https://www.friendsbgadelaide.com/guided-walks>) or a copy in the Noticeboard at the Garden that may be photographed to take with you

This self-guided walk focuses on the plants along the newly resurfaced Rhododendron Trail. In early September the rhododendrons are just starting to flower and this will progress as spring develops. Many of the plants featured on this walk occur naturally in East Asia and the Himalayas and in this garden their requirements for a relatively high rainfall, cool climate and acidic soil can be replicated.

The footpath down towards the Summer House is flanked with colourful shrubs, groundcovers and flowering bulbs at the beginning of September. Camellias of varying shapes, sizes and colours are displayed here, as are spring bulbs of **Narcissus** varieties such as daffodils and jonquils and the white and green tipped flowers of **snowflakes (Leucojum aestivus)**. Small rhododendrons formerly called azaleas line the path and hellebores add to the display.

At the bottom of the path, under a large stringybark eucalypt (**Eucalyptus obliqua**) which is local to this area, you may spot the golden flowers of **Kerria japonica**. This is one of a trio of east Asian deciduous shrubs on this walk. With yellow flowers of varying intensity on bare wood, they make a joyous splash of colour in late winter to early spring. Kerria, the '**Japanese rose**' (in rose family), is a rangy, deciduous shrub with stems emerging directly from the ground. Noted for the profuse golden yellow flowers on bare branches in spring after which small diamond shaped leaves with serrated margins develop. The natural form is single and cultivars are doubles looking like small roses. The genus is named after the Scottish gardener William Kerr who introduced the common 'Plenifora' cultivar, it is an adaptable plant that needs good drainage and, like roses, benefits from pruning after flowering.

Nearby are three small rhododendrons bearing flowers in delicate shades of pink. This is **Rhododendron moupinense** which starts flowering in late winter. Originating from Sichuan in China, this rhododendron is much appreciated for its early flowers.

Take the marked Rhododendron Trail which eventually winds down to the middle road and, if you are energetic, to the Main Lake and the lower car park. You will soon pass through a small grove of an erect evergreen plant called **Chinese holly grape** or **Mahonia lomariifolia** which has distinctive holly-like leaves. Native to Myanmar, China and Taiwan, and growing to 3 m these can be single or multi-stemmed plants with reddish new growth and bright yellow flowers in erect terminal racemes. The flowers are followed by powder-blue to dark-blue berries.

On the opposite side of the path the fragrant **Japanese andromeda or pearl flower, Pieris japonica** is in full flower in late August/ early September. These evergreen shrubs require the same conditions as rhododendrons and are also member of the same Ericaceae family. The flowers are small and urn-shaped and form drooping panicles in spring. The new leaf growth is an eye-catching red/ bronze.

As the path turns to the left there is a large deciduous shrub from Japan prized for its unique late winter blooms. This is the second in the trio of yellow flowers mentioned above. Despite its cumbersome name **Stachyurus praecox** (praecox means early flowering or precocious), the dormant and leafless pendant racemes of 10-20 flower buds resemble strings of pearls hanging from each gracefully arching branch. The buds open to pale yellow bell-shaped flowers. They are followed by ovate leaves which colour to pink or red before falling in autumn. It needs well-drained, moist neutral to acidic soils.

Camellia fraterna is a camellia species with unusual tubular white flowers with gold tipped stamens. Native to the evergreen forests of SE China the slightly fragrant flowers hang down along the drooping stems in late winter to early spring. The flowers, leaves and form of the shrub are quite different to the larger formal japonica hybrids with which we are familiar.

Further along the path are large **common rhododendron** trees **Rhododendron ponticum** which are an anomaly in this East Asian section of the garden, and have an interesting history. This rhododendron is native to the Iberian Peninsula in SW Europe and the Caucasus region of NW Asia.

It has become naturalised in other areas of Europe including the UK where it is a pest plant. It has attractive violet/purple flowers but a dense suckering habit and is frequently used as a rootstock onto which more attractive rhododendrons are grafted, but its suckering habit means that it can overtake the intended grafted plant. Here at the Garden, the Ash Wednesday fire of 1983 damaged much of this higher part of the garden, including grafted rhododendron plants but the common rhododendron survived, as these specimens attest.

The primrose yellow flowers of *Rhododendron lutescens* from China unfold early in spring and cover this evergreen species profusely. The delicate funnel shaped flowers and bronze red new growth together with its slender growth make this rhododendron an elegant plant.

There are over 1000 different species of rhododendron (and many more cultivars) and growth, leaf and flower forms vary considerably. Opposite is the far more imposing *Rhododendron grande* from the Himalayas. Notice the large leathery leaves, dark green above and silvery white and tomentose (heavily covered in fine hairs) below. The bell-shaped flowers are borne in large dense rounded trusses, pinkish in bud and opening to ivory white.

Take the path to the new bridge and notice the even larger-leaved *Rhododendron macabeaenum* with its leathery leaves up to 30 cm in length. The tree can grow to 12 m high and the flower trusses are pale to deep yellow with a purple basal blotch. In its native range it is restricted to NE India. The large leaves enable this shade-loving plant to gather as much light as possible in order to grow well and flower.

Contrast this to *Rhododendron racemosum* with its very small leaves and numerous small pink funnel-shaped flowers with prominent stamens. Growing to 2 m tall, this dense small to medium-sized shrub originates from SW Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan in China. Its smaller leaves suggest it grows in more open terrain.

Where the Rhododendron Trail meets the road, you have a number of choices. You can return the way you have come, continue across the road and descend the lower section of the Rhododendron Trail, or go to the left or right and return uphill to the upper car park.

An interesting return route is to go right and then take the path to the right labelled "Alternative Route". Before you do, notice the bright yellow flowers of **golden bell, Forsythia** which border the LHS of the road. This is the third of the trio of yellow flowering shrubs which flower on bare wood. *Forsythia* from the olive family consists of 11 species ranging from eastern Asia to south-eastern Europe. The leaves are usually simple and opposite but it is the profusion of flowers arriving in early spring that make these plants popular. The bright yellow deeply four-lobed flowers with petals joined only at the base precede the leaves. The genus is named after William Forsyth, a royal head gardener, who was a founding member of the Royal Horticultural Society. They are cold hardy, tolerating most soil types, in full sun or light shade.

The Alternative route climbs through a quiet corner of the garden where the native bushland adjoins more cultivated sections of the Garden. Near the corner a young conifer called *Cunninghamia lanceolata* is a member of the cypress family. Native to central China this tree is commonly known as **Chinese fir** (though botanically it is not a fir but a cypress) and it is grown as a plantation tree and prized for its soft yet highly durable, scented timber. Another common name is coffin tree. The foliage consists of spiral leaf arrangements of green lanceolate leaves. As this specimen shows it is also a handsome landscape tree.

There will be a variety of native flowers on the LHS of the path. These include common heath or *Epacris impressa* with pink (occasionally white) tubular flowers, large-leaf bush pea *Pultenea daphnoides* with its golden buds followed by pea-shaped orange-yellow flowers, black-eyed susan *Tetralochea pilosa* with pink pendant 4-petalled flowers, and myrtle wattle *Acacia myrtifolia* with broad leathery leaves and pale-yellow flowers.

Any of the uphill paths return you to the upper car park.

MS, JH, NF 08-22

