

Autumn 2023

MOUNT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN WALK FROM THE UPPER CAR PARK



To help keep visitors keep COVID-19 safe we provide a copy on the Noticeboard at the Garden that may be photographed to take with you or there is a downloadable version on our website (<https://www.friendsbgadelaide.com/guided-walks>)

After a late spring, caused by cold wet conditions, a relatively mild summer has ensured that the Mount Lofty Botanic Garden (MLBG) will have a spectacular show of autumn glory. This walk focuses on other delights in the MLBG, and visitors are urged to admire the views during the walk as the Garden is likely to be a riot of colour. As a prelude, as you make your way into the garden to the left, the *Berberis* sp. hedge, sometimes referred to as barberry, is showing its typical kaleidoscope of colours. *Berberis* is a large genus including both deciduous and evergreen shrubs ranging from 1-5 m high. The deciduous *Berberis* are well known in Europe through to North Africa and the Middle East to central Asia. *Berberis* has dimorphic shoots, being long and short. The long shoot have non-photosynthetic leaves which develop into clusters of spines (3-30 mm long) and the short shoots develop from buds in the axils of each thorn-leaf. This combination makes *Berberis* an excellent hedging plant with both its autumn colours and a gentle reminder not to push through the planting.

The path to the left passes through a collection of *Camellia* spp showing a wide range of forms offering enthusiasts different leaf shapes, flower colours and growth habits. Note *Camellia pendulosa* on the left, selected for its cascading form and fish tail leaf shape. Another feature this season is that there is an abundance of seed-bearing fruits. The range of size, colour and covering (ranging from smooth to hairy) is an additional feature. Camellia fruits are edible (tea leaves are the cured or fresh leaf tips and buds of *Camellia sinensis*) and contain oils which are used for cooking in China. Further along are specimens of *Acer macrophylla*, the Oregon maple, featuring the largest leaves (15-30 cm) of the genus. These maples are native to the north-west coast of The United States and up into British Columbia and are the only commercially exploited maples for construction timber.



Stay on the high path and on your right is a clump of *Calycanthus floridus*, the Carolina allspice. The common name relates to the highly fragrant flowers with strawberry, pineapple and banana tones. The scientific name is formed from the Greek *kalyx* meaning calyx and *anthos* meaning flower. The flowers will finish in early autumn leaving complex seed pods as a feature.



Further on and on your left is a specimen of *Arctostaphylos manzanita*, the common manzanita. It is endemic to California and grows in the dry western areas at elevations above 300 m. This shrub has many features including shiny green leaves, decorative peeling bark, lantern-like white flowers in spring, then white berries that turn to red towards autumn. The berries look like little apples ('manzanita' means little apple in Spanish). The leaves have been used medicinally by native Americans and the berries have been made into cider. The plant can survive bushfire, as the leaves burn readily leaving the branches unscathed. This is a large specimen compared to its home range as fire has not restricted its spread.

Make your way through the *Taxus* sp., yew "cathedral" where the trunks make the buttresses and the soaring branches) form a vaulted ceiling (at 2-3 m high). You are now at the old Noel Lothian Lookout (named for a former Director of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide) with views over the Piccadilly Valley and the foreground of MLBG autumn colours, a reminder of Noel's vision for South Australia's cool climate Botanic Garden.

Keep left and above the path is a fine specimen of an Irish strawberry tree, *Arbutus unedo*. Although it is not related to the common strawberry, during the depression it was used to bulk out strawberry jam. Its native habitat ranges from the Mediterranean to the west coast of Ireland, where its presence is a relic from an age when the climate was warmer. It is a small evergreen tree which hybridises regularly, is fire resistant and will re-grow from a lignotuber thus rendering it valuable for preventing soil erosion as well as providing food and



shelter for insects, birds and animals. In its Mediterranean habitat it often remains shrublike as frequent fires occur. Its fruit is bland, although Pliny the Elder claimed that its Latin name meant 'one is enough'. The plant is claimed as Italy's national tree (from the fruit colours of red and white on a green bush) and the coat of arms of the city of Madrid includes a bear eating the fruit.



In this area is a collection of **Quercus spp** (oaks) with an interesting diversity of leaf shapes and growth habits. On reaching the main road continue across it down the hill on the steep but passable path. Note the use of local timber to repair the path and help with erosion control. On your right is a magnificent oak whose branches are acting as elbows leaning on the ground where natural layering (root formation) is occurring. Layering is one technique nurseries use in propagation of plants. Take the path to your right and across the slope.

On your right is a **Tetradium danielli**, known as the bee-bee tree in Korea and China and it certainly was alive with bees at the time of preparation for this walk. Nearby is an **Acer rubescens** which is one of the 'snake bark maples', native to Taiwan. It has flowers in spring and shiny new triangular leaves that colour to vivid red in autumn. The bark is green and marked by white striations. They are distinguished by the markings on the smooth bark, red leaf stalks (petioles), and racemes of small, winged fruits called samaras.



As you reach the road, on your right, there is a **Cercidiphyllum japonicum**, known as a katsura, which is one of the largest hardwoods in Asia. The trees have a burnt toffee smell emanating from the heart-shaped leaves in autumn. It is listed as endangered in China and can be found in its native habitat of the northern forests of Japan growing to 45 m high. The genus name refers to the close resemblance of the leaves to those of *Cercis* (redbuds).

The path finishes with a "throne" carved from an old **Eucalyptus obliqua**, the messmate stringybark, which is native to the region. What better place to admire and smell the katsura after exploring some of the fascinating plants in the MLBG?

EB, LE, RH and NF 03/23

