

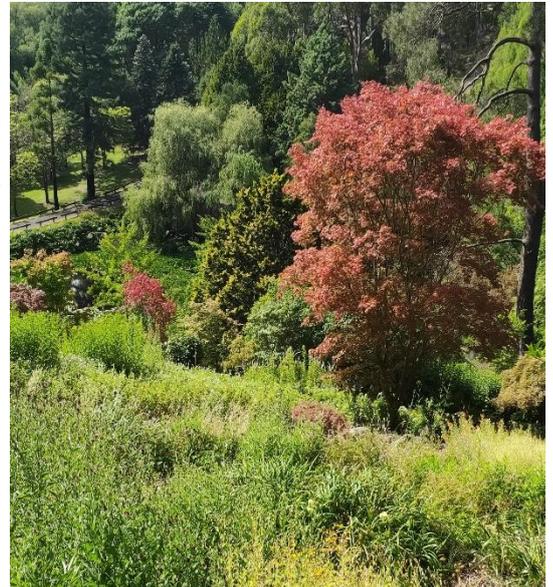
# MT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN

## FEBRUARY 23 walk from the LOWER CAR PARK



To help keep visitors 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>)

This month, the Guides focussed on developing a walk that takes advantage of the cooler, shadier and colourful sections of the Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens (MLBG). To begin, make your way on the curved path down to the Lake wall. On your left is a feature planting of dwarf sunflowers. The sunflower is native to North America and was first grown as a crop by indigenous tribes over 4,500 years ago. Native Americans cultivated the sunflower from its original bushy, multi-headed type to produce a single-stemmed plant bearing a large flower. Generally today we grow these plants from seed as an annual, but there are smaller perennial species, and *Helianthus tuberosus* is the Jerusalem artichoke, grown for its edible tubers. Spanish sailors were the first to gather up large quantities of sunflower seed and ship it back to Europe. But for the next 200 years, Europeans overlooked the food and oil-bearing potential of sunflowers. Instead the exotic-looking flowers became widespread across Western Europe as an ornamental or, to a lesser degree, medicinally as an anti-inflammatory.



Make your way across the dam wall and up the steps and follow the path to the right through the Acer collection. One specimen of interest is *Acer pseudoplatanus* or sycamore which is native to Europe and Western Asia. Notice the upper surfaces of the leaves are bluish-green and their undersides are brown to purplish. They gradually change colour towards the end of summer to yellow before being shed in autumn. Seeds are hanging on the trees now and are shaped to fly like little helicopters, allowing travel with the wind for wide dispersal. The tree has become an environmental weed in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania where it spreads rapidly along waterways, in open woodland and wet sclerophyll forests.

On reaching the main road turn right and then head left up the hill at the intersection. Cross the lawn in front of the gazebo to where the path enters the woodland garden. On the right is a pair of *Malus trilobata* or erect crabapple tree. The sign at the base also provides the German name, dreilappiger apfel. The 3-lobed leaves resemble those of a maple and, like many maple trees, the leaves of this plant also colour well in autumn. In spring, its white flowers produce small yellow fruit. Those features, plus its erect form make it a worthy garden plant. In the wild it is found in Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Greece, and Bulgaria.



Take the path to the left heading across the hill face. On your right is a swathe of *Symphoricarpos albus* or snowberry which is a deciduous shrub of the honeysuckle family. It is native to North America where it grows in thickets, spreading from rhizomes in shady and moist environments. It is popular in gardens for its decorative white berries in winter and is also used for erosion control. The shrub and berries are toxic to humans but apparently not to other animals and birds.

On your left is a healthy alder tree (*Alnus* species). Alders are not commonly planted in South Australia as their roots can damage plumbing and building foundations. Paradoxically, alder timber provided the foundations for many of the buildings and bridges in Venice, including the famous Ponte di Rialto. These timbers have survived underwater for hundreds of years in the Venetian lagoon, sometimes in a petrified condition. Have a look at the cone-like seed pods on this tree – they resemble the cones of larches and some pines, but alders are flowering plants, not conifers. The alder flowers are hanging catkins, like those of their close relatives, the birches. Alders and birches love wet feet, so they have been planted in several of the wetter areas of the MLBG to provide shade.

Take the lower path on reaching the shed and enjoy the *Thalictrum delavayi* or lavender showers below the path which thrive in shady, damp conditions. It produces delicate small raindrop-like purple flower buds which open to a pale purple with quivering prominent stamens. The effect is misty or cloud-like and the ferny foliage adds another dimension of delicacy. The species name honours Pere Jean-Marie Delavay, one of the French missionary botanists who collected plants in China in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We have now reached the area known as the woodland garden. This area features *Hydrangea*, commonly named the hortensia, which is a genus of over 75 species of flowering plants native to Asia and the Americas. By far the greatest species diversity is in eastern Asia: China, Korea, and Japan. They may be shrubs, but some are small trees and yet others reaching up to 30 m by climbing up trees. They can also be either deciduous or evergreen, though the widely cultivated temperate species are all deciduous.

*Hydrangea* is derived from Greek and means 'water vessel' in reference to the shape of its seed capsules. The earlier name, *Hortensia*, is a Latinised version of the French given name Hortense, honouring French astronomer and mathematician Nicole-Reine Hortense Lepaute. The flowers of hydrangea act as natural pH indicators, sporting blue flowers when the soil is acidic and pink when the soil is alkaline.

*Hydrangea* flowers are produced from early spring to late autumn; they grow in flowerheads (corymbs or panicles) though gardeners tend to refer to them as 'mopheads' or 'lacecap'. Typically the flowerheads contain two types: small non-showy fertile flowers in the centre or interior of the flowerhead and large, sterile showy flowers with large colourful tepals which are not part of the reproductive portion of the flower, known as sepals. Plants in wild populations typically have few to none of the showy flowers, while cultivated hydrangeas have been bred and selected to have more of the larger type flowers (see *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Merritt's Supreme' at right).



Continue the path ahead if you wish to explore the woodland further. We recommend you then take the path up to the right where there are some fabulous hydrangeas in flower. You will notice the fragrance of the flowers of *Clethra alnifolia* which explains the 'sweet' in sweet pepperbush, the common name for this tall deciduous shrub. It is native to the swampy coastal areas of eastern USA and spreads largely by suckering. Pepper refers to the shape of the fruits as it is not spicy. Both genus and species names refer to the alder tree. However, neither the resemblance nor botanical relationship is close. There are many cultivars from white to a strong pink.

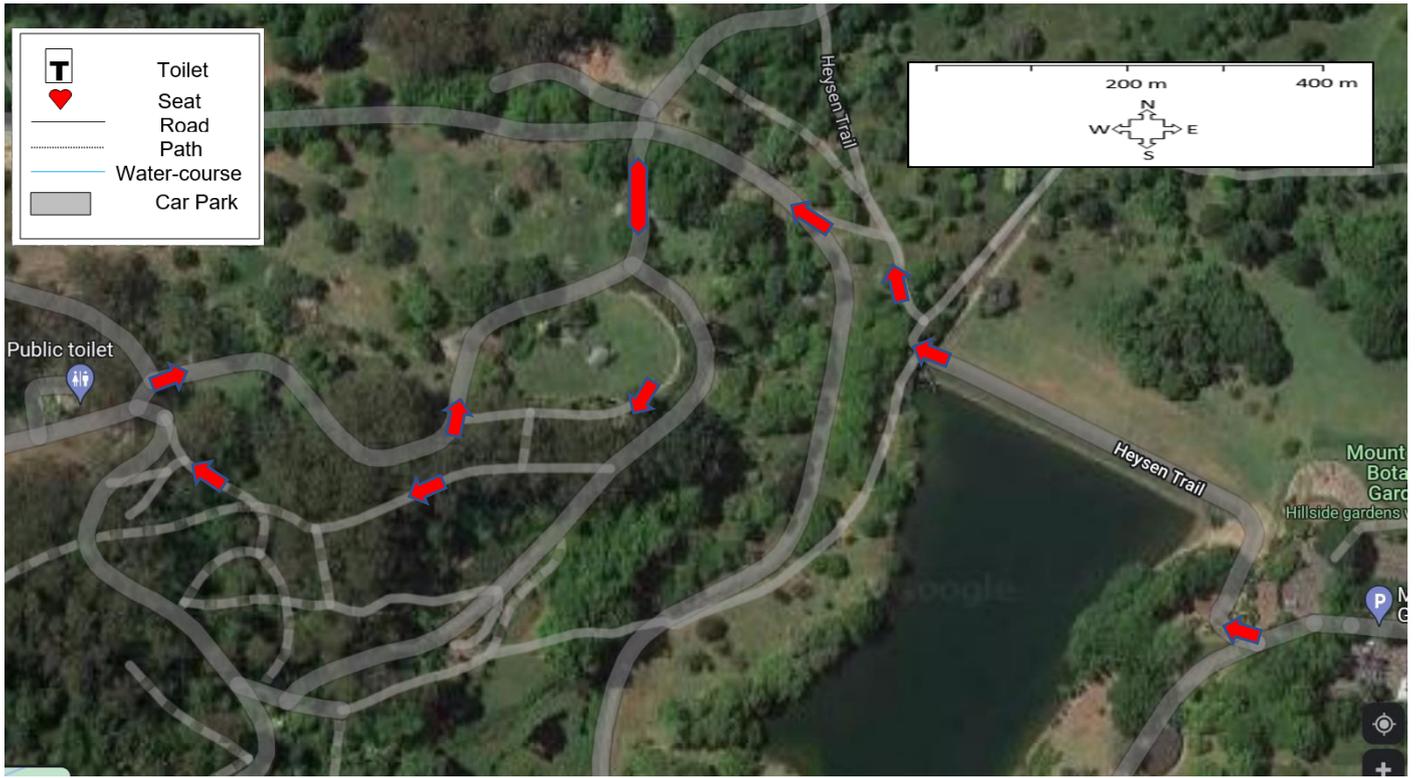
Further on there is climbing hydrangea, *Hydrangea petiolaris* clinging to a native stringybark tree (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) on the right side of the path. A vigorous deciduous climbing plant it can grow to 15 m and originates in Eastern Russia, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. The leaves are oval with finely serrated margins and the lace cap white flowers contain tiny white fertile flowers in the centre surrounded by a ring of showy white sterile sepals, as do some other hydrangeas. Remnants of last year's flowers can be seen higher up the trunk.

Continue down the road and on your right is a thicket of *Thuja plicata* which is native to north-west North America and is in the cedar family (Cupressaceae). It is commonly called western red cedar. It has scale-like leaves and can grow to 70 m in height. It is commonly used as a hedge or screen because of its ability to sprout new growth when it is cut back to bare wood- something most conifers will not do. Native Americans used all parts of the tree and regarded it as supplying all they needed for life.



Finally, as you come down the path, a fine **European hornbeam** tree (*Carpinus betulus*) is on your left. This tree is frequently used for topiary displays and clipped hedges in French formal gardens. It is not commonly seen in Australia. Hornbeams, like their alder and birch relatives, have small catkins of flowers which develop into a drooping chain of small nuts, each enclosed by a 3-lobed bract. "Hornbeam" comes from the Old English words for "hard" and "tree". The timber is indeed very hard and is used for parquet flooring and tool handles. It is sometimes called "musclewood".

EB, BD, LE, JH, HM, RH and NF 2/23



This leaflet has been prepared by the Garden Guides funded by the Friends of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide Inc.  
For information about the Friends and/or guided walks, please telephone 8222 9367  
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