

# MT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN

## MAY 2025 WALK FROM THE LOWER CAR PARK



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

One of the features of the Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens is its collection of deciduous trees and their coloration and leaf fall during autumn. The evolution of a deciduous habit provided an alternative strategy for surviving harsh winters (protection from cold damage and to conserve energy) as compared to evergreen habit. In deciduous trees an abscission point (natural detachment of leaves and fruit) is formed as a layer of cells in spring during active growth. Plants produce a hormone called auxin which maintains this layer through until late summer. Under autumn conditions, or if the plant is under stress, the hormone levels reduce which triggers cell elongation within the abscission layer. This allows the leaf to break away without damage as well as forming a layer to seal the break.

After such a dry summer this year, only well-watered trees are retaining their leaves and showing their true autumn colours. Begin this walk by taking the road to the left and around the dam which ultimately leads to each of the seven gullies which form the structure of this garden. These gullies are planted in themes, either by species or by a geographical location. On reaching the Chris Steele-Scott pavilion note the ***Cotoneaster franchetii***, an attractive semi-deciduous low maintenance plant with orange-red berries which is suitable for growing as borders in hard to grow areas. *Cotoneaster* is a genus of flowering plants in the rose family, Rosaceae. At the Main Lake sign look along the road to the right where the trunks of **Scots pine, *Pinus sylvestris***, stand out with their orange-reddish bark, the second specimen further on being particularly stunning. The species name "sylvestris" means "of the woods", and Europeans consider it the archetypal pine tree. Below and ranged on the edge of the Main Lake, is an interesting collection of ***Taxodium distichum***, the **swamp cypress** which is native to the south-eastern United States. These trees, established in the mid-2010s, are deciduous conifers. Most conifers are evergreen, but this species has evolved to be deciduous to aid its survival in swampy conditions. These are two selections in this collection, ***Taxodium distichum* var *imbricarium*** and ***Taxodium distichum* 'Cascade Falls'**.

In addition to autumn leaf colours, the display of the **Oriental bittersweet, *Celastrus orbiculatus*** is notable. It is a deciduous vine from China and Japan and it has three valved yellow capsules which open to display bright red arils covering the seeds. These hang on well into winter after the leaves have fallen. A little further and on the right is one of eight sculptures placed along Lakeside Loop (this one is entitled *Miracle of life*, a stylised leaf), which is an accessible walk for all visitors. Each sculpture has braille translations of the poetic descriptions. These sculptures were dedicated in late 2015. The intention is to forge strong emotional connections between visitors and the plants in the MLBG.

<https://www.botanicgardens.sa.gov.au/visit/mount-lofty-botanic-garden/sculptures-art/artwork>

At the turn in the road is a small pond, behind which is dense sub-tropical growth from a number of specimens native to New South Wales. On the other side of the road, an autumn display of mature ***Hydrangea* sp.** flowers may be observed, adjacent to several tree ferns. Continue the Lakeside Loop and just before the entry to South American Gully, there is a swathe of purple flowering ***Verbena rigida*** also known as **Slender Vervain**. The leaves are deeply toothed, and pollination is usually by butterflies or moths, followed by a fruit containing 4 narrow nutlets....notice also several ***Heteropterys angustifolia*** or **Mariposa** with vivid red/crimson winged seed pods.

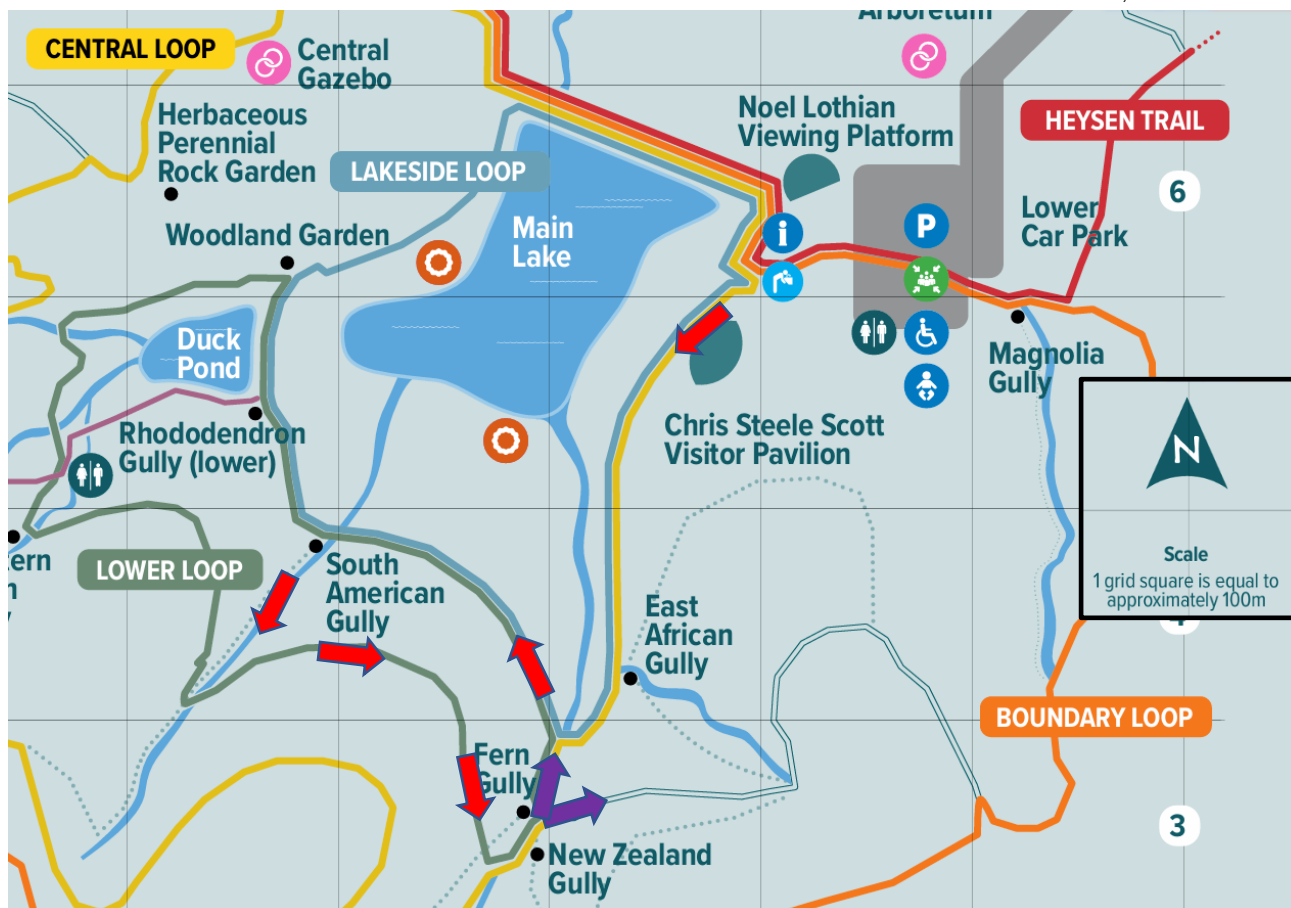
Take the path on the left into South American Gully and on your right is a drift of red-flowered ***Canna warscewiczii***, a species native to Costa Rica and Brazil, which flowers over summer and into winter until

frosts inhibit flower development. Contrasting purple flowers may be seen nearby in another native from Brazil, *Tibouchina urvilleana*, also known as a **princess tree**. Its sprawling bushy growth (3-6 metres) proves it to be a surprisingly cold tolerant South American native able to thrive in the acid soils and sheltered areas available at Mount Lofty. On the left and further on are several specimens of *Fuchsia microphylla* or **small-leaved fuchsia** which have been cloud pruned. This technique is applied to great effect across many shrubs in the MLBG by one of the talented gardeners. This specimen responds well to the pruning and the tallest has begun to flower highlighting the miniaturised flowers which will produce berries described as edible.

On reaching the first path to the left visitors may notice a 'curry' smell, which is associated with *Escallonia* species. One example, *E. organensis* is further up this path on the right and has glossy leaves with a leathery appearance. Flowering was complete in early autumn and featured terminal racemes of white, pink and red flowers. The curry smell is a breakdown product as the leaves compost on the soil and seems to linger throughout the area around the Escallonia collection. Continue the path and note the regrowth on the upper slope which has regenerated after a cool burn for fire risk reduction in 2018. This regrowth is dense with minimal weeds (apart from Bracken [*Pteridium*] which is ubiquitous and one of the oldest, from an evolutionary point of view, ferns) and now has many of the species native to the area as a reminder of its appearance before Europeans arrived in South Australia. The views out to the left show glimpses of the Main Lake, the last of the autumn colour and the Piccadilly Valley in the distance.

Take the Lower Loop path down to the left, avoiding the land slip from heavy rain from last year. On your right is a well-established *Araucaria bidwilli*, known as the **Bunya** or **false monkey puzzle tree**. The bark is fascinating with rows of pebbly outgrowth. The tree is native to eastern Queensland and provides a significant annual food resource through its large cones to the Aboriginal people and is of cultural significance. Continue into Fern Gully, crossing the bridge. At the next intersection either take the upper path into the Araucaria plantings or head down the lower path into New Zealand Gully for an interesting meander back down to the Main Lake.

HM, RH and DS 5/2025



This leaflet has been prepared by the Garden Guides and funded by the Friends of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide. For information about the Friends and/or guided walks see [www.friendsbgadelaide.com.au](http://www.friendsbgadelaide.com.au)