

WINTER 2025



MOUNT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN WALK FROM THE UPPER CAR PARK

We provide a copy of this walk on the Noticeboard at the Garden that may be photographed to take with you or there is a downloadable version on our website www.friendsbgadelaide.com/garden-guides see Mt Lofty Botanic Garden Upper Car Park Walk.

Welcome rains in late May and early June have restored the feeling, sights and smells of a cool climate garden after 16 months of rainfall gaugings of less than half of the long-term average. To begin this walk, make your way down to the road heading to the left of the car park. This area includes many of the Camellias in the Mount Lofty collection which is comprised of approximately 40 out of the known 200 species of Camellias and over 100 cultivars. In this area there are specimens rescued from gardens in the path of the South-Eastern Freeway, which was developed in the 1960s. They are planted on top of Stan's wall which borders the upper side of the roadway. Stan Schutz began building the hand cut sandstone retaining wall as part of his role as a gardener, then volunteered in retirement to complete over 200 metres of wall. On the wall are a series of leaf shaped signs which include details of the history, geography, as well as details on soil profiles and climate of the Garden.

One specimen to look out for, is ***Camellia japonica*** '**Kingyo-Tsubaki**', a rare camellia with the common name of "fish-tail" because of the unusual leaves with pointed apices. The Camellia Encyclopedia, compiled by Stirling Macoboy states that; *although it's single flowers are sweetly scented and tinted a delicious strawberry ice cream shade, this curious variety of Camellia japonica is prized more for its unique foliage. Every dark, shining leaf is divided and twisted at the tip like the tail of a fancy goldfish. And that is what the Japanese call it-"Kingyo-Tsubaki"- the 'goldfish camellia'. Elsewhere it has been known as "Quercifolia"(oak leaf) or merely "fishtail", but the Japanese name is surely more appropriate. The plant is vigorous, blooming early to midseason, and parent to many cultivars.*

The leaf characteristic of this Camellia selection provides a neat segue to the oak (***Quercus***) collection which features in this area. There are 500 to 600 species of oak worldwide, this Garden having some 75 specimens. Most are deciduous but with some evergreen, with a range of differing leaf forms and long lived. All oaks feature acorns, their large seed or nut. Oak timbers have been so valued that entire forests in England, France and Spain were denuded of old trees for shipbuilding in the struggle for naval supremacy in the European theatre. The timber features resistance to water and most pests.

The view down the hill through the native **Messmate stringy bark, *Eucalyptus obliqua*** is reminiscent of the vegetation of this area before development of the garden began in 1957. One of our collection of Greg Johns' sculptures *Between Earth and Sky* may be found downhill. Note the nearby dark green leaves of the **live oak, *Quercus virginiana*** from the deep south of the United States. It does retain its leaves for most of the year but drops them with the emergence of new spring foliage, meaning it is not a true evergreen. Above Stan's wall is a Chinese cork oak, ***Quercus variabilis***, with thick corky bark and leaves with pale undersides. Each leaf vein ends in a fine hair-like tooth. The species name *variabilis* relates to the underside of the leaves being lighter than the upper. Whilst in China this specimen may be used for cork, its production pales in comparison to that of the western cork tree, *Quercus suber* which is predominantly grown in Portugal. Nearby is a *Quercus palustris* or **pin oak** from the swamps of America. It is a prized garden specimen for its gorgeous autumn colours (there are many established in the Stirling main street). It tends to hold its leaves long after the bright red has faded unlike most deciduous oaks.

Follow the road on down the hill to the right with the Nature Trail featuring on the left. This is an older area of stringybark regrowth together with a carpet of native undergrowth specimens. On the right are specimens of **Chinese mahogany or toon, *Cedrella chinensis*** on either side of road planted after Ash

Wednesday as a deciduous fire break. It features bright pink new growth in mid spring with a distinctive unusual odour. It becomes deciduous in mid to late summer.

Follow the Boundary loop to the right which passes through a thicket of *Thujopsis dolabrata*, native to Japan and known as **asunaro**. This is a conifer, resembling a cypress and the only member of this Genus. Further on is a *Camellia lutchuensis*, which is a species Camellia featuring small leaves and single white flowers with a sweet perfume which are produced through winter into spring. Nearby is another sweet scent from *Luculia*, *Luculia gratissima* (Latin for most pleasing) The flowers have a very sweet, delicious musk-jasmine fragrance that lingers up to 15 metres away from the 3-metre-tall plant. Continue up the hill passing through a grove of **Japanese maple**, *Acer palmatum*. At the time of the recce for this walk this area featured a carpet of small yellow deciduous leaves and a multitude of blue wrens foraging in the open lattice of branches. Continue uphill to the bridge and enjoy the view down into Rhododendron Gully.

Nearby are purple-hued buds and leaf petioles of *Rhododendron fortunei* ssp. *fortunei*, which are unusual and contrast with the normal green form of *Rhododendron fortunei* directly behind. This is a plant named for Robert Fortune who is renowned for introducing plants from China (and Japan) into western gardens. He was a Scottish botanist and plant hunter, introducing over 250 plants to Britain the USA and Australia. He is credited with the successful introduction of commercial quantities of **Chinese tea plants**, *Camellia sinensis*, from China to India on behalf of the British East India company. Follow the path up to the left and a specimen of *Mahonia fortunei*, the **Chinese** or **Fortune's Mahonia** or **holly grape** is another of the plants sourced and shepherded from China. This features bunches of foliage on the tips of stems with flowers being racemes of yellow flowers.

To complete this walk, continue up the hill to the upper car park.

RH and HM 6/25

