

MT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN

2026 April walk from the Lower Car Park



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

Autumn colours are one of the major features of the Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens (MLBG) providing a riot of shades in its deciduous tree collections. Most plants have a green colour which is due to their chlorophyll content. Chlorophyll is a biomolecule which enables a process called photosynthesis where plants absorb light energy and convert it into a food source for plants. Chlorophyll strongly absorbs energy from the blue and red portions of the light spectrum whilst reflecting green light. As deciduous trees prepare for winter senescence, their leaves change function which includes ceasing production of chlorophyll as well as breakdown and recovery of key nutrients ready for storage over winter. As the chlorophyll level declines other natural pigments in the leaf become visible. Yellow is the default colour for most plants. However, there are many species which contain pigments which provide contrasting colours, including shades of red and orange. Some plants also produce pigments as nutrients are recovered. Anthocyanin is one of these pigments (from the ancient Greek for flower [Anthos] and [cyanin] dark blue) which will range in colour from red to black depending on the pH. Anthocyanins are the colour compounds in red wine and are also found in a wide range of berry fruits. Over time, gardeners have selected plants for their autumn display and the MLBG has a wonderful collection established together with stunning vistas.

To begin this walk, head over to the display garden to the west of the car park and on down the looping path which goes on to cross the dam wall. This display garden currently features *Salvia longispicata x farinacea* 'Mystic Spires'. This is a more compact version of 'Indigo spires', as well as being classed as more heat tolerant. Another delightful feature plant *Fuchsia procumbens*, the **creeping fuchsia**, may be found ten metres further on from the steps in the raised garden on the right. This is a prostrate creeper which is flowering with tiny yellow sepals, instead of petals, contrasting with blue pollen in their anthers.

Along the edge of the viewing platform, which is now above and to your right, is a border of *Berberis x smithii* 'Hancockii', which is showing its palette of autumn colours. There are many selections of *Berberis*, all with distinctive characteristics that make them excellent specimens as deciduous border plants. *Berberis* spp. have two forms of shoot types (dimorphic). Its long shoots form the main structure of the plant and are non-photosynthetic. These shoots form thorns providing an additional border plant feature. The other type are short shoots (1-2mm) which form leaves in their axils and provide the attractive colour variations seen in selections of these plants.

On approaching the wall crossing you will note two of the eight sculptures placed along the path around the lake which enables accessibility for all visitors. Each sculpture has braille translations of their poetic descriptions. The intention of this collection is to forge strong emotional connections between visitors and the plants in the MLBG. The sculptures were designed by Martins, a specialist company. Martins teamed with Iguana in production of the sculptures and Oxigen for the landscape design. More details and images of these sculptures are available at <http://martins.com.au/portfolio/lakeside-trail>. On the right of the dam wall, and downhill at the start of the "Wet Arboretum" are several **Chinese tallow tree**, *Sapium sebiferum*, whose diamond shaped leaves are always spectacular in autumn. The species name of this plant means 'wax-bearing' and it is ranked as the third most prolific producer of oil for biodiesel.

On the right of the bridge is a relative of the wine grape family (Vitaceae), *Ampelopsis brevipedunculata* (Latin origin meaning with a short flower stalk). It features bright turquoise, blue and mauve berries displaying well into winter. To the left of the steps at the end of the dam wall is a highly coloured vine, *Vitis coignetiae*. This vine is native to Asia and is named after Mr and Mrs Coignet who were so enchanted by the plant on a trip to Japan in 1875 that they took seeds back to France. On their return, it was evaluated as a Phylloxera resistant stock. At this time, the Phylloxera vine aphid had devastated French wine production and grafting of wine varieties to this, and other resistant stocks, saved their industry. South Australian viticulturists recognised the devastation of phylloxera and implemented import restrictions early enough to ensure that it is still phylloxera free.

Continue to the left on the path around the Main Lake. Further on there are several new plantings of selections of both the giant and the coastal redwoods. As was the case for the MLBGs highly coloured

foliage collections, these specimens were selected and propagated for their unusual forms. The drooping habit featured in *Sequoiadendron giganteum* 'Pendulum' attracted horticulturists to preserve it through propagation as did the soft blue contrast in the related *Sequoia sempervirens* 'Aptos Blue'. For comparison, look to the huge, related specimens which dominate the background to this area. Just ahead are their 'cousins', *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, or dawn redwood, which frame the background to the Duck Pond. The dawn redwoods are deciduous, and their needles are just beginning to turn a reddish brown. Another deciduous conifer is *Taxodium distichum*, or bald cypress. There are several specimens below and to the left as the main drive meets the Duck Pond. These trees are native to the south-eastern and Gulf coastal plains of the United States and are slow growing and long-lived, preferring areas which are saturated or at least seasonally inundated. The specimens by the Main Lake have distinctive 'knees', which are a part of the root structure and provide support in soft swampy soils. Just ahead and to the right is a fascinating grafted selection of the Bald Cypress, *Taxodium distichum* 'Cascade Falls'. This selection is a miniature with weeping habit and provides a stark contrast to its enormous cousins.

Follow the path up and to the right of the Duck Pond. On your left is a long branch of a *Cedrus atlantica* 'glauca pendula', a weeping blue atlas cedar. This is currently defying gravity and will need a support to highlight its features. Further on, another selection of the dawn redwood *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* 'Gold Rush', has been chosen for its distinctive yellow foliage. Continuing and below and to the left, are drifts of miniature *Cyclamen hederifolium* which are in full flower, providing an interesting contrast to the green foliage around this area.

Make your way up the path to the right which will join the road above this section known as the woodland garden. Admire the view back across to the Duck Pond with its contrasting colours, tree shapes and forms. Climbing the hill, you will pass drifts of Japanese Windflower, *Anemone hupehensis*, previously defined as *Eriocapitella hupehensis*. They are native to Asia, and the epithet means from Hupeh, a province in China where it is aptly described as the "broken bowl" flower.

Nearing the top of this road and in the garden beds to the left there are *Escalonia* plantings which have been shaped as cloud formations. The MLBG has several gardeners who are adept at sculpturing suitable plants into topiary forms. The term topiary derives from the Latin for an ornamental landscape gardener, *topiarius*. Continue down and, on turning right, the plantings below are an arboretum of selected species with a wide range of autumn colours which will develop and continue their display well into May. Make your way back down to the Main Lake, enjoying the vistas below and across the Lake. RH, EB, RH and DS

We are a group of volunteer Guides who prepare these monthly walks, all members of the Friends of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens. The Friends would greatly appreciate if you would e-mail letting us know if you find them useful, or if you have any suggestions for future self-guided walks at info@friendsbgadelaide.com



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