

MT LOFTY BOTANIC GARDEN

2026 August - September 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>)

This walk visits the Gardens extensive collection of **Magnolia** species, where already, some specimens are flowering having started to exhibit their beautiful blossom in late July. Magnolias are one of the most primitive flowering plants in evolutionary history (Cretaceous period, 95mya). Fossils of members of the family Magnoliaceae have been found in Europe and Greenland. They have a common ancestry with conifers, which develop cones and are wind pollinated, whilst magnolias have developed flowers and are insect pollinated. They have retained a cone structure for seed development and have tepals which have differentiated into petals and sepals in more modern flowering plants. Today they are indigenous only in Southern China and the Southern United States. Their stamens are basic with pollen sacs on either side, and they have male and female parts within the same flowers. The flowers evolved to enable pollination by beetles and are extremely robust to avoid damage from feeding (they pre-date bees). They may be evergreen, but most species are deciduous. Note that magnolias flowering before leaves emerge all have Chinese origins, although there are many Chinese and American species which flower after leaves expand.

To begin this walk, head towards the large oak tree adjacent to the lookout platform which is surrounded by a massed planting of **Daphne odora**, with fragrant pale pink tubular flowers. It is native to China, Japan and Korea. This display also has the white flowered form **Daphne odora 'Alba'** with a hint of lemon in their scent. Follow the narrow, downward path to the right of the oak, admiring the standard specimens of **Prunus mume 'Pendula'** on your left. This is a Chinese plum cultivar, which is found in Japan and Korea. The first blossoms often appear in a snowy landscape and are a welcome harbinger of spring and a symbol of perseverance and resilience. The plum is known as one of the 'three friends of winter' along with bamboo and pine, often represented in Asian art. The fruit is widely used in Chinese, Japanese and Korean cuisine. On your right are arching sprays of golden-yellow pom-pom **Japanese kerria** flowers **Kerria japonica** var **'Pleniflora'**. These provide a surprise feature in late winter and throughout spring in cool climate gardens. Deciduous in winter, it grows between one to three metres in height, often scrambling over other vegetation. It was named after the plant collector William Kerr who introduced it to western cultivation.

At the bottom of this path and up to your right is a **Garrya elliptica** or **silk tassel bush**, native to the coastal ranges of California and southern Oregon. It is an erect, bushy, evergreen shrub to 2–5 m. It is named for Nicholas Garry, who was secretary of the Hudson's Bay Company (1820-35). *Elliptica* is derived from Greek and means 'about twice as long as broad', or 'elliptic' in reference to its leaf shape. It has *separate* male and female plants. Both have cylindrical pendulous flowers (from which it gets its common name - silk tassel bush) but the male catkins are longer (up to 30cm) and grey-green whilst the female ones are shorter and silver-grey. Above each small bract is a single flower inside the inflorescence. Once pollinated, females produce ripened purplish black fruit about 1 cm in diameter containing tiny dark seeds.

At the bottom of this path and across the roadway is a flowering **Chimonanthus praecox** or **wintersweet** originated in China. It's common names (Wintersweet or Japanese allspice) allude to its sweetly fragrant winter flowers which appear on bare stems. It's a welcome sight and scent when most deciduous shrubs are dormant. Make your way up the road admiring the tortuous shape of the **Aesculus x neglecta** specimens on your right, also known as the **painted buckeye**. This is a natural hybrid (the seeds resemble deer eyes) with many seeds (conkers) in the mulch under the trees. These develop from panicles of yellow spring flowers which, when pollinated, form rounded seed capsules containing toxic seeds. Carl Linnaeus, the father of modern taxonomy, named the genus *Aesculus* after the Roman name for an edible acorn. On your left are several **Magnolia stellata** or **star magnolia** which is amongst the first of the magnolias to begin flowering each season. It is native to Japan and was introduced to the United Kingdom around 1877.

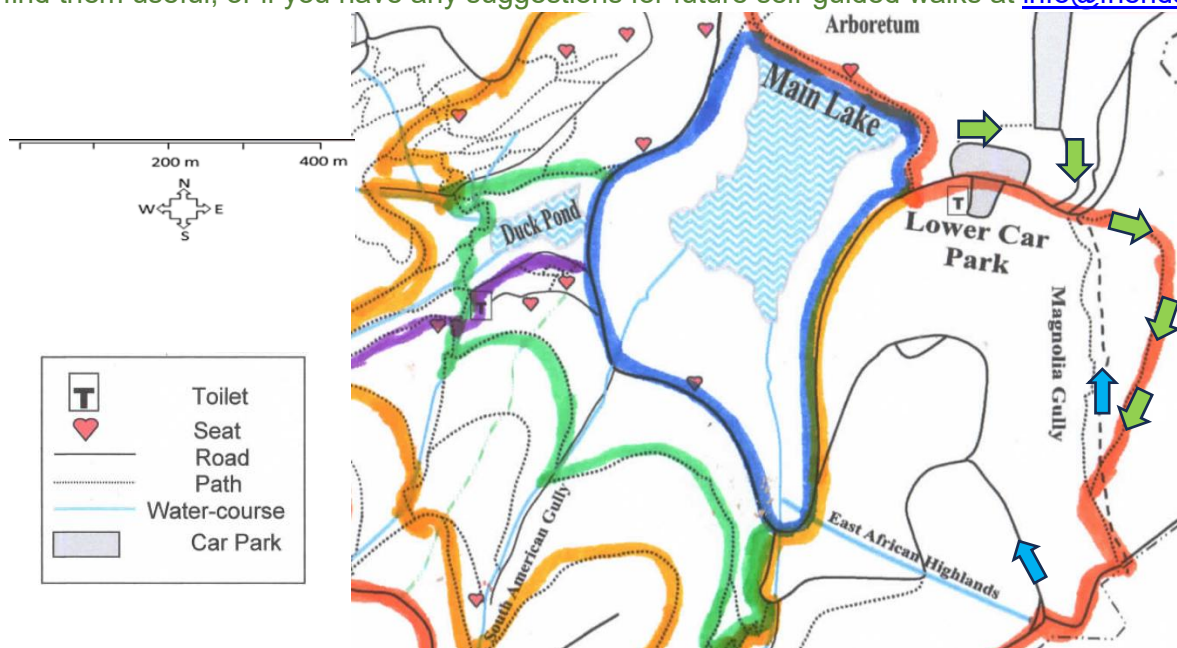
Cross the entrance road and take the uphill path to the left, walking between several specimens of **Michelia**, which have been included within the *Magnolia* genus since 2006. The distinguishing feature of flower position i.e., that magnolias bear their flowers at the end of the stem whilst the flowers of *Michelia* arise in the leaf axis, is no longer thought to be sufficiently important to warrant separate genera. As an example, **Michelia doltsopa 'Silver Clouds'** is one of 45 species of mainly evergreen, tropical trees with scented flowers, and some with scented wood. The leaves are magnolia-like, shiny above and sometimes

hairy on the underside. Further on there is an evergreen magnolia from China, *Magnolia delavayi*. The species name honours Père Delavay a French Jesuit missionary to China in the late 19th century. It has a bluish tinge to the leaves that is referred to as glaucous in botanic descriptions. It flowers in mid-Summer, which is the same timing as the American bullbay magnolia, *Magnolia grandiflora*. The flowers are large and almost dinner plate sized and cream in colour. This is part of the evidence that botanists use to understand the distribution of related plants across different continents. In the Jurassic period (200mya) the single large continent of Pangea had Gondwana (southern continents) split away leaving Laurasia (northern continents). Further tectonic movement saw the European and Asian block remaining connected while North America went its own way taking its population of magnolias with it. The two main groups of magnolias are referred to in the sense of the main distributions in China and North America.

Hybridisation among the cultivated north temperate species of magnolia from eastern Asia has produced many beautiful flowering shrubs and trees. One of these, on your right, is *Magnolia x soulangeana* 'Royal Crown'. A precocious flowerer, this young tree has narrow purple-pink buds that open before the leaves in early spring to pale pink flowers with 12 tepals. The tepals curve outwards at the top to give a crown-like appearance. It forms an upright tree with an open rounded canopy. Nearby, on the left, is a **Chinese coffin tree or Chinese fir, *Cunninghamia lanceolata*** which has interesting cones. There are other timber trees throughout China and Taiwan named "coffin tree" demonstrating the value of the scientific binomial system. The woods of these trees usually are light and strong with a pleasant aroma.

Further on is an evergreen a *Magnolia champaca* or **champak magnolia** which features fragrant flowers varying from yellow gold to white. It is a canopy tree growing to 40 metres in tropical and sub-tropical forests across south and east Asia and Malesia. Essential oil used in perfume is extracted from the flowers which bloom from early summer into autumn. Some of the aggregated seed pods at present look like fresh green olives, whilst other seed pods have ripened to reveal interesting brown follicles spotted with white. On your left is a magnificent *Pinus patula* or **Mexican weeping pine**. This evergreen coniferous tree has wide spreading branches and grows up to 30 metres, featuring a reddish-brown bark. It has a distinctive weeping foliage with bundles of 3 thin and flexible pine needles which droop beneath the branches. One of the Guides mentioned that the appearance of the needles was like a Yorkshire terrier. The needles can be up to 30cm in length and persist for two to three years before falling to create a russet carpet. Further on the left is *Thuja plicata* 'Zebrina' with attractive green and gold foliage. It features flat shoots and side shoots, all in a single plane. Near the top of, on the right are two *Taiwania cryptomerioides*, a species which is now extinct in the wild. It is also another specimen known as a "coffin tree". At this point, either return downhill to the car park following the path on the right or continue up the hill, then follow the road to the right down through East African Gully (see →) EB, LE, JH, SS, DS and RH

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