

Mount Lofty Botanic Garden



SPRING 2026 Walk from the UPPER 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 features the plant genus **Camellia**, in particular some of the species' types. Whilst many of us are familiar with the large colourful flowers popular in gardens and nurseries, there is a varied range of camellias to explore in this genus which originate from eastern and southern Asia. The walk will take you on a lesser explored route to the species camellia collection and include some other plants which display interesting features at this time of the year. Some of the Garden's native wildflowers are also included.

Commence by walking down the path behind the noticeboard to the bitumen road. Along this path are examples of winter and spring blooming camellias with their dark green foliage, and flowers of many colours, shapes and forms. Many of these are nursery-bred cultivars of **Camellia japonica**, the Japanese camellia. Plant labels display the family name (Theaceae), the genus name (Camellia) and the species name (japonica). A common name may be included. If the plant is a cultivar, an additional name in single quotation marks e.g., **Camellia 'Peach Blossom'** is added. Other camellias species used widely for producing cultivars include **Camellia sasanqua** and **Camellia reticulata**. The beds alongside the path also feature **Narcissus** (jonquils and daffodils), snowflakes, bluebells, **Helleborus** (winter rose), and **Viola** (violets), all of which thrive in the cool Mt Lofty conditions.

Turn left onto the bitumen road, noting **Camellia japonica 'Yuriba Tsubaki'**, with its narrow red flowers splashed with white and its narrow leaves. Both the flowers and leaves differ from what might be expected. More camellias line the left side of the road and are primarily **Camellia japonica** cultivars. Also of interest is a series of three **Prunus subhirtella 'Pendula'**, or flowering cherry trees, and if your visit is timed to coincide with these in flower, you will see why flowering cherries attract so much attention. The delicacy and colour of their airy pale pink flowers is unforgettable. You will note that these trees have straight or 'standard' trunks onto which the cultivar 'Pendula' has been grafted. A carpet of blue **Serbian bellflower Campanula poscharskyana**, along the top of "Stan's Wall" underplants camellias which were rescued from gardens in the path of the south-eastern freeway in the early 1960s.

On the left side of the road two **silver** or **weeping birch** trees, **Betula pendula**, which have been grafted onto standard trunks. This accentuates the weeping, or pendant foliage of the tree. Silver birch is native to Europe as far east as Turkey and has become naturalised in other parts of the world. There are over 30 species of birch. They are typically short-lived pioneers, widespread in the northern hemisphere, and in areas of temperate and boreal climates. All birch bark is characteristically marked with long horizontal lenticels, and often separates into thin, papery plates. A few more species will be seen during this walk.

Just after the sculpture by SA artist Greg Johns "Earth and Sky", turn right onto a small footpath. Here is a collection of small **snakebark maple** trees **Acer rubescens** which will burst into flower briefly as spring progresses. Whilst their flowers are not large or particularly colourful, their presence is a clear sign of warmer days ahead. **Acer rubescens** is native to Taiwan, and this planting heralds the East Asian focus of the plant collection in this area of the Garden. Turn left here.

Another of the birch species is prominent on the right of the path **a little further down**. **Chinese red birch, Betula albosinensis** var. **septentrionalis**, is grown for its pale peeling trunks. Mature trees shed large sheets of pinkish beige paper-like bark, with a white waxy bloom then revealing smooth patches of chestnut brown. This is an excellent example of the benefit of seeing trees without their foliage in early spring as it is easy to miss such features when they are covered in leaves. The deciduous multi-stemmed shrub fragrant winter hazel **Corylopsis glabrescens** flowers early in spring with drooping clusters of pale-yellow flowers on brown stems. It is native to the mountains of Kyushu Japan.

Just before the path turns right, notice an ant hill on the left and one of the native plants of the stringybark forest of the Mt Lofty Ranges, the **common flat-pea Platylobium obtusangulum**. This small shrub has spiky triangular opposite leaves, and red and yellow pea-shaped flowers. Turn right at this point. In springtime there are more native flowers to discover here, including **common heath Epacris impressa** with pink (sometimes white) tubular flowers much sought after by birds such as the honeyeaters, and the yellow flowered **spiky guinea flower Hibbertia exutiacies**.

Particularly prominent in early spring is a taller shrub known as **large-leaved bush-pea Pultenea daphnoides** with its wedge-shaped dark green leaves ending with a fine prickly point, striking brown flower buds followed by deep yellow flowers marked with red. Black-eyed Susan **Tetradlea pilosa** also flowers in spring. The retention of pockets of native bush is an important element to this Garden. The low growing plants provide food and shelter for small animals, including birds that are in decline across the landscape. The canopy of light shade provided by the tall stringybarks

Eucalyptus obliqua protects the more tender cultivated plants below, as well as providing a home to bird life. Together it is an ecosystem which is as much part of the Garden as its exotics.

The camellia collection here comprises species first collected in their native environment and from which all others have developed. The country of origin is displayed on the labels. The flowers on many of these are small, abundant and with many stamens, and often white. The collection comprises approx. 40 species, with supporting plants from their region of origin. Most of the camellias in this section originated from the Adelaide Botanic Gardens and were grown in the Simpson Shadehouse to survive Adelaide's summers.

Examples of species camellias include ***Camellia transnokoensis*** from Taiwan with its tiny pink and white buds opening to white flowers. A little further on is ***Camellia tsaii*** which has a graceful slightly weeping form, undulating leaves, and small white flowers. It is native to China, Vietnam, and Myanmar. The larger pink flowers of ***Camellia reticulata*** (syn. ***C. heterophylla***) from Yunnan, China may still be blooming too. The bell-shaped buds eventually open to flat flowers. This species camellia has been cultivated by Chinese gardeners for centuries, but only fairly recently by western gardeners who have extensively hybridised it with other camellia species. This species has the largest flowers of all the camellias and can grow to 15 meters in height. The seeds are used to make cooking oil in China.

A collection of **Japanese andromeda** ***Pieris japonica*** cultivars on the right side of the path is particularly colourful and eye-catching in spring, for both the white lily-of-the-valley type flowers and the red new foliage. Cultivars here include 'Forest Flame', 'Temple Bells', 'Saraband' and 'Christmas Cheer'. Like rhododendrons, *Pieris* is a member of the family Ericaceae, and it likes similar growing conditions. Turn left to see more camellia species, including ***Camellia chekiangoleosa*** with its rich red flowers highlighted by a golden boss of stamens. As the species name indicates, it is found in China where it is cultivated for its oil-rich seeds. The species flowers early in spring.

When you reach the bitumen road, turn right onto the road and then follow one of the marked paths back uphill through the delightful upper section of the Rhododendron Gully to the upper car park. RH, JH 8/26

We are a group of volunteer Guides preparing 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 suggestions for future self-guided walks at info@friendsbgadelaide.com

