

Mount Lofty Botanic Garden



AUTUMN 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>)

March heralds the beginning of Autumn, much loved for its cooler nights, pleasant mild days and if we are lucky, a little rain. Plants respond to these conditions by ripening their fruit, scattering their seed, and for some, by colourful changes to their leaves before discarding them for winter. This walk explores some of these characteristics, starting from the upper car park.

Take the narrow path downhill behind the notice board. Although most of the camellias in this section won't flower until winter, in autumn you may come across *Camellia sinensis* flowers. These often bear what is known as a single flower, with a single row of relatively flat petals, and often scented. On either side of the path heading down the hill are two grafted weeping trees, *Betula pendula* f. 'youngii' on the right and *Prunus subhirtella* 'Pendula' on the left. The former, commonly known as the weeping silver birch, is a cultivar of the silver birch tree characterised by its graceful pendulous branches and delicate foliage. Silver birch is native to Europe and parts of Asia. 'Young's Weeping Birch' was named after the discovery of a chance seedling in about 1874 by the nursery of Maurice Young of Milford, Surrey, England. The leaves of *Prunus subhirtella* 'Pendula' or weeping cherry are glossy green throughout the summer and into autumn when they turn a vivid yellow, dropping for winter. Also known as 'The Weeping Higan Cherry', it flowers in spring, having light pink (almost white) flowers that cover the branches before the leaves emerge.

At the end of the path turn left onto the roadway. More birches can be seen on the rise walking alongside 'Stan's Wall'. They are easily recognised by their bark, marked with long horizontal lenticels for gas exchange. On the left as heading uphill stands *Betula pendula*, the silver birch. Further along is *Betula papyrifera*, the paper birch of North America. Closely related to *B. pendula*, it has thin white bark that peels in paper-like layers to reveal pinkish inner bark. Its oil-rich, waterproof bark can remain intact even after the wood beneath has rotted.

Turn off the road onto a narrow path to your right just past Greg Johns' statue 'Between Earth and Sky'. On this corner a persimmon tree *Diospyros kaki* (from China, Northeast India and northern Indochina) may still have its green fruit and leaves, or they might be turning colour as autumn progresses. In the latter case, the round orange fruit should be visible, if the local fauna have not already feasted on them. Persimmon fruit have a distinctive woody calyx which remains on the fruit until it is harvested. Another deciduous, small tree on this path is one of the snakebark group of maples *Acer rubescens*. The leaves, seeds and the green striated bark of the tree are typical of this group of trees. The leaves of this maple tree will turn a brilliant red as autumn progresses. The cluster of ripening, winged seeds are called samaras, and we will see more of these features further along this walk.

Turn left and continue through the remnant bush of the Mount Lofty Botanic Garden. Known as stringybark open woodland with a heath understory, there are a wide variety of plants of all sizes here, from the majestic stringybark *Eucalyptus obliqua* to the middle layer of acacias and various pea flowers to the smaller scrambling ground covers. Flowering from late summer into autumn is the Hills Daisy *Ixodia achillaeoides*, a small to medium shrub with papery white flowers. Later in autumn look for Common Heath, *Epacris impressa* which has pink, red or white pendent flowers from autumn through to spring.

Turn right when you reach an orange Boundary Loop sign. Lovely views may be had of the distant hills through the stringybark trees, down towards the lower section of the Garden. *Ailanthus vilmoriniana* is a beautiful tree with bunches of samaras, visible now in Autumn. There are at least 5 species of *Ailanthus*, commonly called 'Tree of Heaven', found from east Asia to Australia, with this particular one having slightly bristly shoots and reddish leaf stems. Seeds of this species were collected in Sichuan, China by a French missionary Père Paul Farges in 1897 and sent to nurseryman Maurice L. de Vilmorin who raised plants at his nursery in Les Barres. The specific name honours this family of nurserymen. *Idesia polycarpa* is a medium sized tree and it is the only species in the genus *Idesia*. It goes by the common name of Chinese wonder tree. In pollinated female trees, the heart shaped leaves take on autumnal shades of yellow with bright orange berry-like fruits. These persist and become redder well into winter. The species name,

polycarpa, means 'many fruits'. These fruits are edible and are eaten either cooked or raw, in its native countries of China, Japan, Taiwan and Korea.

Turn right at the orange Boundary loop sign. Immediately on the right is an ***Acer capillipes*** - Snakebark Maple, native to mountainous areas of Japan. It is best noted for its snake-like, olive green bark accented with narrow, white vertical striping, which is most visible when juvenile. As the trunk thickens this remarkable feature fades gradually. The young twigs are shiny red. The broad leaves have three-pointed lobes which turn from orange red to deep red in autumn. The flowers grow in long, greenish white pendent racemes, which give way to 2-winged samaras.

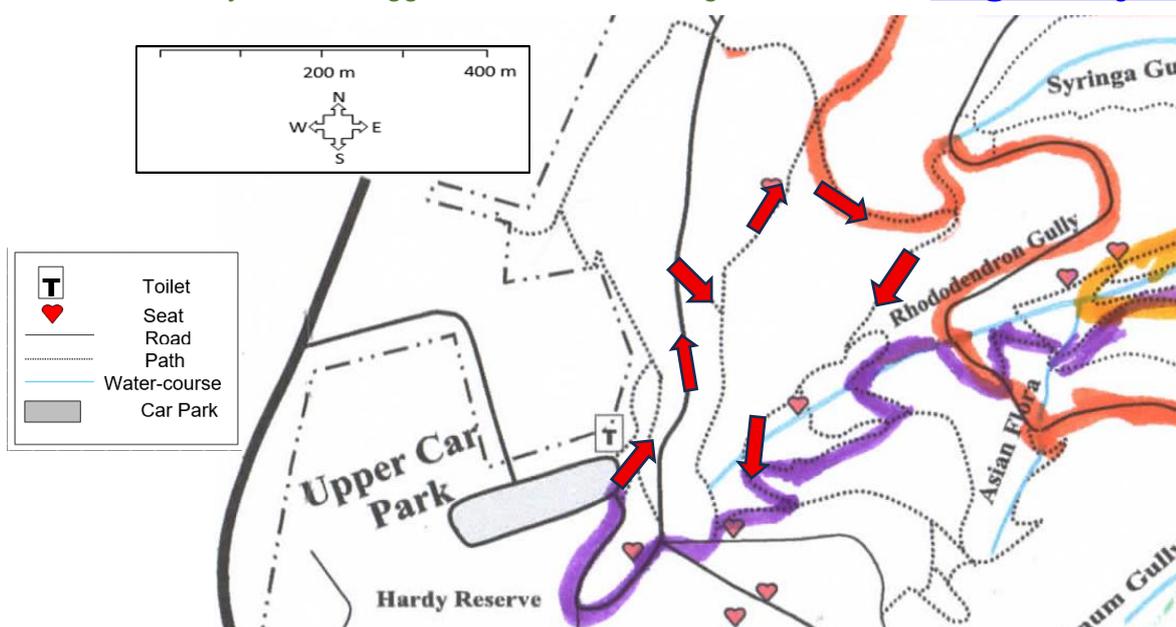
On approaching the next junction, look right for ***Davidia involucreta***. The first European to discover this tree was the French missionary Père Armand David in Sichuan, China 1869. He was also the first European to encounter the Giant Panda and many other plants and animals. The common name, handkerchief tree, refers to the spectacular sight of white bracts which surround otherwise inconspicuous flowers during spring. During autumn, it will display rich reddish coloured foliage and developing fruits.

At the junction turn right and admire the fragrant white flowers of ***Luculia grandiflora***. *Luculia* is a genus of flowering shrubs from the Himalayas to Southern China which typically flower from late spring through autumn and into winter. The path then takes you uphill through some old tree ferns which survived the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983. ***Dicksonia antarctica*** and ***Cyathea sp.*** tree ferns are native to eastern and SE Australia and are much tougher than their fine lacy foliage might suggest.

Cross onto the paved path which is the top part of the Rhododendron Trail. On your right sweet viburnum or ***Viburnum odoratissimum*** is eye-catching with its glossy green leaves and bright red berries. The species is native to a wide area of north and southeast Asia. Take the road to the car park which sweeps left around the large garden bed, which always has an interesting display. At present this includes some late flowering lilliums, colourful hydrangeas, and the rich purple flowers of ***Tibouchina urvilleana***, a South American plant. The fragrant pink-flowering ***Luculia pinceana*** will soon break bud, and last for months. A highlight of this bed in early March is ***Albizia julibrissin*** var. ***rosea*** or **Silk Tree**. This is a fast-growing, small to medium sized, deciduous tree with a spreading, often umbrella-like crown, native to Asia (Iran to Japan). It is noted for its bipinnate compound dark green leaves with a fern-like appearance. The sensitive leaflets close when touched and at night. Fluffy, pink, powder puff flowerheads cover the tree all summer and into autumn. The flowers are fragrant and attractive to bees. They give way to flat bean-like seed pods (to 16 cm long) which persist into winter. The genus name honours Filippo del Albizzia, an Italian naturalist who introduced it to Europe in the 18th century.

RH, SS, LE, DS, SH, RH, JH March 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



This leaflet has been prepared by the Garden Guides funded by the Friends of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide Inc. www.friendsbgadelaide.com.au