

Yaralla Estate

Self-guided botanical walk

Yaralla Estate, home to the Dame Eadith Walker Hospital, was built as a healing environment that uses spacious and green spaces to screen outside bustle and offer patients, staff and visitors peace, productivity, beauty and therapy. Before being repurposed as a hospital, Yaralla Estate was a much-loved home for the Walker family, with staff living on and off-site to maintain the Estate and tend to cows, horses, chickens, vegetable gardens and fruit orchards. Today, such places are records of landscape design, planting palettes, and trends of earlier ages. Curious visitors, gardening enthusiasts and designers who explore the Estate can learn about plants that provide refuge for plants and animals and last the test of time.



Starting from the main gates on Nullawarra Avenue, visitors can observe the following old trees and rare plants:

- 1** **Brush box trees** (*Lophostemon confertus*), a rainforest tree from northern New South Wales and Queensland, this tough tree forms the drive's entry avenue. It also lines many suburban streets and parks from the Federation era (c.1880-1920). These ones are stumpy as they're on hard, dry shale (heavy clay/rock) with little water.
- 2** **Bidwill's hybrid coral tree** (*Erythrina x bidwillii* 'Bidwillii'), just inside the main gates, in the island bed where the driveway splits, this spiny bush bears vermilion-red clusters of pea flowers in summer. John Bidwill was a merchant and hybridiser who bred new plants like this at Camden Park Estate for friends, the Macarthurs. Edmund Blake was a gardener at Camden Park. The Walkers, keen gardeners, would have known Macarthur descendants.

- 3 **Native tamarind** (*Diploglottis australis*), another native rainforest tree, is just inside the inner (garden) gate on the right near the fence. Look for and be sure to feel its large, velvety, golden-haired pinnate leaves. In time, the tree will bear clusters of juicy, sweet-sour, golden, berry-like fruit. It is a component of moist, coastal rainforests and rarely seen in gardens.
- 4 **Port Jackson or rusty fig** (*Ficus rubiginosa*), just inside the main gates, in the middle of the island bed where the driveway splits, this is a fine old specimen. Yaralla Estate has several large old figs, of this and other sorts. This one is native to coastal New South Wales and Queensland and has smaller leaves and less-aggressive roots than big sister, Moreton Bay fig. Two other huge Port Jackson figs are north-west of the front door past the sunken garden.
- 5 **Red-wing** (*Heteropterys glabra*), along the left-hand side of the main inner drive, is this leathery-leaved, woody vine from Argentina and southern Brazil. Sprays of gold flowers appear by early summer followed quickly by brilliant red fruits that resemble sycamore wings.
- 6 **Moreton Bay fig** (*Ficus macrophylla*), on the left-hand side of the drive, looming over the paddock. Note its leaves are smooth, gold-coloured, and larger than the leaves and fruit on the Port Jackson fig.
- 7 **Mexican blood trumpet / scarlet trumpet vine / red bignonia** (*Distictis buccinatoria*), on the right of the drive, facing the Rose Garden, this vigorous creeper vine from Mexico grows hot pink or magenta trumpet-shaped flowers.
- 8 **Mauritius hemp** (*Furcraea selloa* 'Marginata'), beyond the island bed, on the right side of the middle pathway, are these giant, spiky succulents. They grow rosettes, which sprout trunklets and then huge 'fishing rods' of flowers which turn into multitudes of satellite baby plantlets. Once an important economic crop for fibre (for rope, twine, cloth), 'spikies' were high fashion in Victorian and Edwardian bedding schemes and shrubberies.
- 9 **Poison bush / wintersweet** (*Acokanthera oppositifolia*), beyond the island bed, on the left side of the middle pathway, this bush flowers in September with perfumed clusters of jasmine-like flowers and olive-shaped fruit, but don't eat – they're quite toxic. Used by South African tribes as poison in hunting, this tough, old-fashioned shiny-leaved bush quietly grows in the shrubbery, unaffected by droughty spells.
- 10 **Turpentine** (*Syncarpia glomulifera*), is one of the key component trees of turpentine-ironbark forest, an endangered community found on heavier clayshale soils in inland Sydney, such as here. Its rough, corrugated bark, rustic structure and stiff, shiny leaves give it a distinct look. Flowers are quite different from eucalypts as are its fruits.
- 11 **Gunbarrel / flintwood / brown birch / mountain cherry tree** (*Scolopia braunii*), in a grove to the left of Yaralla House, this coastal native rainforest tree is slow-growing but with wood so hard it was favoured for making gun-butts. It has small, diamond-shaped leaves and produces cherry-like fruit from December to April.
- 12 **Himalayan cedar** (*Cedrus deodara*), outside the front door, this specimen in the carriage loop shows the importance of conifers to gardens of any size or pretension. In 1865 it was referred to as a fine specimen. Formality of shape was favoured, and the tendency to form horizontal branches. This is Pakistan's national tree and found across the Himalayas.
- 13 **Bangalay / Southern mahogany** (*Eucalyptus botryoides*) a grove of three, north-east of the Sunken Garden. Bangalay can reach up to 30 metres with rough, reddish bark, short trunks and spreading crowns, and usually grows with banksias inside sand dunes in coastal rainforest areas. Their thick bark was collected by Aboriginal people to make canoe hulls.
- 14 **Giant bamboo** (*Dendrocalamus giganteus*), two groves near the wharf mark the Estate's Water Gate entry on Parramatta River which would once have been a main means of transport to and from the Estate.
- 15 **Valley bush / big-toothed milk tree** (*Euphorbia grandidens*) a gangly, succulent tree with tiny leaves and snaking, clustered branchlet stems, hailing from Africa's dry south-eastern woods. Nearly as tall as one in the Royal Botanic Gardens but less dense. Like the poison bush it has milky sap which is both toxic but medicinally-useful.
- 16 **Grotto wonders** – The grotto is rich in succulents, spiky plants and oddities including a dragon's blood tree (*Dracaena draco*) from the Canary Islands. There is an endangered Chinese fan palm (*Livistona chinensis*) and *Trachelospermum asiaticum*, a low-growing scrambler with mottled leaves, cousin of the widely-grown star jasmine climber, *Trachelospermum jasminoides*.
- 17 **Chir pines** (*Pinus roxburghii*), a line of these rare pines grace the eastern edge of the main lawn outside Yaralla House and frame a central path down to the Italian Garden and Grotto.
- 18 **Japanese raisin tree** (*Hovenia dulcis*), along the edge of Yaralla House' rear-service courtyard, there are two of these very rare trees. They have shiny, pointed, smart leaves similar to a giant pear, and produce edible fruit that taste like raisins.
- 19 **Wilga** (*Geijera parvifolia*) is an inland, dry-country tree, with linear, elegant, drooping leaves like a willow. Rarely seen on the coast, one grows in the Rose Garden near the Kalparrin Day Care Unit.
- 20 **Grey mangroves** (*Avicennia marina* var. *australasica*), colonise the tidal foreshores.