

# Self-guided walk - Tree and plant highlights about Yaralla estate

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**Got a spare half-hour?** Convalescent hospitals are a healing environment, deliberately. Surrounds, like this were spacious and verdantly planted to screen bustle outside. Inside were peace, productivity, beauty and therapy: a cure. Not just for patients, but everyone - staff, family and visitors. Even prior to its hospital use, Yaralla was a much-loved family home, for private enjoyment, recreation, entertaining. Being well off, the Walkers had ample space and staff living on and off-site, maintaining the estate: tending cows, horses, chooks, vegetable gardens and fruit orchards. Today, such places are records of landscape design, planting palettes, tastes, fashions and enthusiasms of earlier ages. If you look, there are lessons: what's tough, survives neglect, triumphs in time – good or poor choices. What wildlife loves and will nest in, feed off. Designers, managers and owners of parks, gardens, even small urban courtyards and spaces - take note, on a stroll!



Key things to note are some fine old trees and rare plants, such as these, from the main gates:

- 1 Brush box trees** (*Lophostemon confertus*), a rainforest tree from northern NSW and Queensland, this tough tree forms the drive's entry avenue. It also lines many a suburban street and park 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* 'Blakei'), straight ahead inside the inner gates in the 'island bed' where the drive splits, this spiny bush bears vermillion-red racemes 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 descendents.
- 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 velvety golden-haired large pinnate leaves. In time this will bear juicy, sweet-sour golden 'berry' fruit in clusters. Rarely seen in gardens and a component of moist coastal rainforests.
- 4 Port Jackson or rusty fig** (*Ficus rubiginosa*), a fine old specimen with fluted trunks in the middle of the island bed between the two drives inside the inner gate. Yaralla has several large old figs, of this and other sorts. This one is native to coastal New South Wales and Qld. And has smaller leaves and less-aggressive roots than big sister, Moreton Bay fig (see 6). Two other huge Port Jackson figs are north-west of the front door past the sunken garden.

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- 5 **Red-wing** (*Heteropterys glabra*), a leathery leaved woody vine from Argentina / Southern Brazil, arches along the left-hand side of the main inner drive. Sprays of gold flowers appear by early summer followed quickly by brilliant red fruits that closely resemble sycamorewings. The only other example of this I've seen in Sydney is in the Royal Botanic Garden.
- 6 **Moreton Bay fig** (*Ficus macrophylla*), huge monster just off the drive, east of the cottage near the dairy buildings, looming over its front paddock. Note its shiny leaves are larger than the Port Jackson fig's, and smooth and golden, not rusty/hairy) below, the fruit larger.
- 7 **Mexican blood trumpet / scarlet trumpet vine / red bignonia** (*Distictis buccinatoria*), a hot pink-magenta trumpet-flowered vigorous creeper from Mexico, very rarely encountered in gardens, grows on an old wire frame on the right of the drive facing the rose garden.
- 8 **Mauritius hemp** (*Furcraea selloa* 'Marginata'), giant spiky succulents, which form rosettes and in time, trunklets, send up huge 'fishing rods' of flowers, which turn into thousands 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*) has sweet-perfumed clusters of jasmine-like flowers in September, and 'olive'-like fruit, but don't eat – they're quite toxic. Used by South African tribes as poison in hunting, this old-fashioned, tough bush with its shiny leaves 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 clay-shale 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*), a coastal native rainforest tree (Jervis Bay-Cape York), slow growing but with wood so hard it was favoured for making gun butts. Cherry-like fruit December-April. Small diamond-shaped shiny leaves. A grove beside the house's south-west corner and courtyard near the drive.
- 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. It was mentioned as a 'fine specimen' in 1865. 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 30m with rough reddish bark, short trunks and spreading crowns, usually just inside sand dunes with banksias on the coast in rainforest. Their thick bark was collected by Aboriginal people to make canoe hulls.
- 14 **Giant bamboo** (*Dendrocalamus giganteus*), two huge clumps near the wharf, creaking and swaying in the breeze, mark the entry of the 'water gate' and its passengers onto paths up into the garden to the house. This would once have been a main means of transport.
- 15 **Valleybush / big-toothed milk tree** (*Euphorbia grandidens*) a gangly succulent tree with tiny leaves and 'snaking' clustered branchlets of 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 useful medicinally. One seriously wierd plant.
- 16 Grotto wonders – The grotto is rich in succulents, 'spikies' and oddities: a **dragon's blood tree** (*Dracaena draco*) from the Canary Islands, palms including an endangered **Chinese fan palm** (*Livistona chinensis*) and **Trachelospermum asiaticum**, a low-growing scrambler with mottled-leaves, cousin of the widely-grown star jasmine (*T.jasminoides*) climber.
- 17 **Chir pines** – a line of rare (*Pinus roxburghii*) grace the eastern edge of the main lawn outside the house and frame a central path down to the Italianate Terrace and grotto. Glazed terracotta Italianate urns on pedestals add to the exotic atmosphere here.
- 18 **Japanese raisin tree** (*Hovenia dulcis*), a rarity just east of the southern wall extending from the house out to edge its rear service courtyard. Edible fruit taste like raisins while the leaves are like a giant pear's: shiny, pointed and smart. **You almost never see this!** There are two.
- 19 **Wilga** (*Geijera parvifolia*) is an inland dry-country tree, with elegant drooping, linear leaves like a willow. Rarely seen on the coast, one grows in the rose garden's eastern 'point' near Kalparrin Day Care unit, in the former 'Magnolia' cottage.
- 20 **Grey mangroves** (*Avicennia marina* var. *australasica*), colonise the tidal foreshores.