



About the gardens

Make your way to the main entrance sign on the corner of Downes Rd and Walker St. in Castlemaine. Here you will find a map and general overview of the gardens and their collections.

Covering 23.4 hectares, these gardens were carved out of the traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung people and fenced off in 1860 in the heat of Victoria's gold rush.

Local nurseryman Frederick Hirschi first requested land for them from colony officials in 1854.

Philip Doran was appointed as their first curator in 1866 and remained in that role for 47 years until his death in 1913. He is said to have laid out the gardens, with a guiding hand from the then colony of Victoria's botanist Baron Ferdinand von Mueller. Plants were collected to see how they performed in the Castlemaine climate.

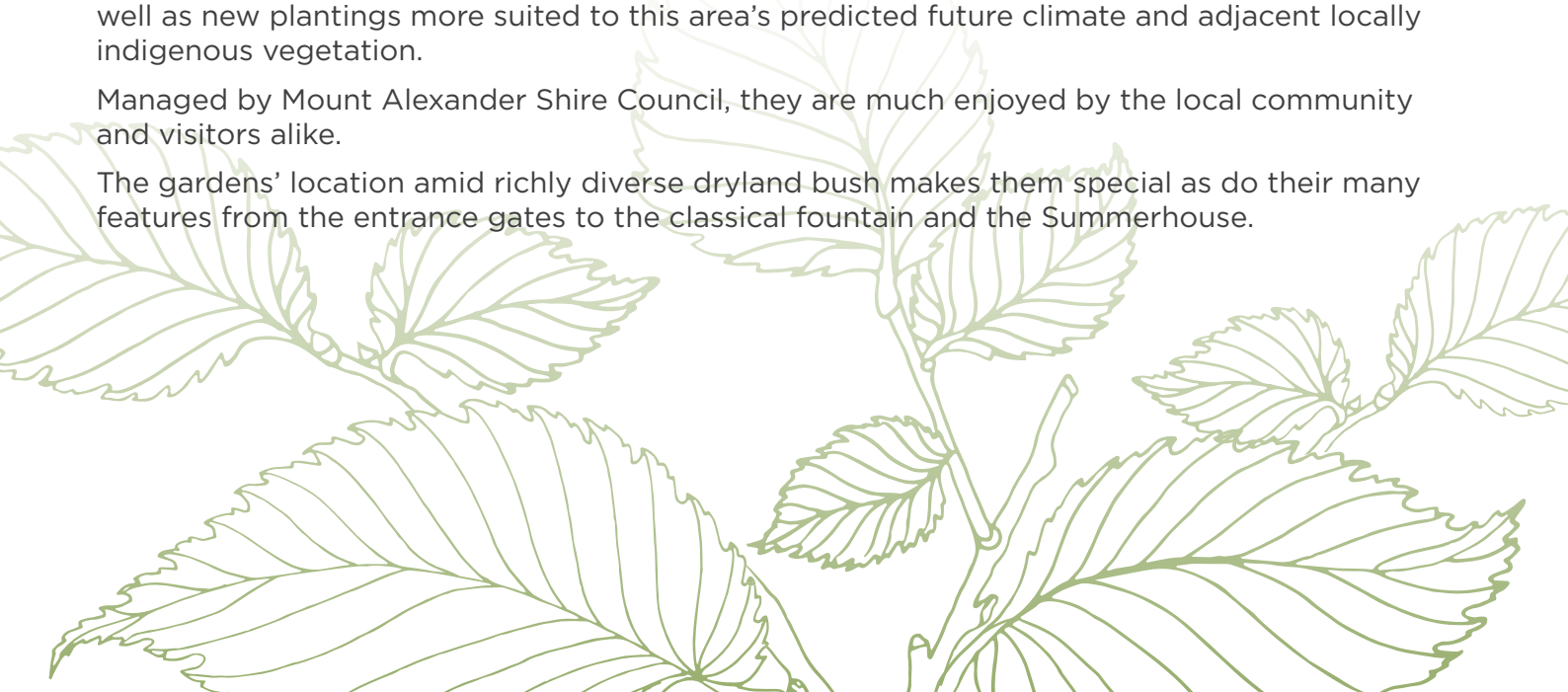
The gardens are an outstanding example of a regional public gardens created in colonial Victoria. In 1998 they were listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.

Throughout the gardens, many indigenous plant species names have been translated into Dja Dja Wurrung language. We thank the Dja Dja Wurrung people and the Djaara Corporation for translating these. Dja Dja Wurrung language connects their people to water, land, animals, spirits, and People, calling their Martinga kuli to ceremony and strengthening their identity.

Around the gardens are rare trees, oaks and pines of great age and botanical significance, as well as new plantings more suited to this area's predicted future climate and adjacent locally indigenous vegetation.

Managed by Mount Alexander Shire Council, they are much enjoyed by the local community and visitors alike.

The gardens' location amid richly diverse dryland bush makes them special as do their many features from the entrance gates to the classical fountain and the Summerhouse.





Significant features of the gardens

Interpretive signs throughout the gardens identify 10 notable plant collections and other features. They are:



Climate change

Over time as the climate has become hotter and drier, gardens everywhere have had to be adapted. This is happening here as well.

Predicted increases in temperature and reducing annual rainfall, with less frosts will affect the growth and viability of existing plants especially those from cool temperature climates. Trees preferring warmer conditions may thrive. It also means a new suite of plants, from parts of the world currently experiencing Castlemaine's predicted future climate, can be grown here.



Ethnobotanical highlights

Many trees and plants selected by original curators of botanical gardens were chosen to test their suitability for the climates in which they were grown. If parts of them could also be made into food or tools, then perhaps they could be put to good commercial use. Informed by cultural traditions and developing science, the plants on this walk feature elements – bark, sap, nectar, branches and leaves – that serve useful purposes ranging from cancer treatments to incense, roof thatching and more.



Historical features

As you walk around, keep an eye out for landmark heritage features.

From the ostentation of the front gates, to the European-influenced classical fountain, the weir on Barkers Creek to the Summerhouse, these features reveal much of the era in which they were built. Others are not so obvious. In the Sunken Reserve over Barkers Creek, now a grassed field, government landscaper Hugh Linaker's planned cricket ground with terraced seating and a pavilion was never built. His 1938 plan survives.



Box Ironbark Forest

These gardens are significant not only for their historic importance but also because they include part of the surrounding dry bushland, now known as the Box Ironbark forest which extends over much of central Victoria inland of the Great Dividing Range. Box Ironbark forests are unique to Australia. In Victoria they have been extensively cleared for farming, gold mining and urban development. The Flora and Fauna Reserve is a patch of these forests which include Eucalypts with the common names Box and Ironbark.

Fact sheet 1



Oaks and pines

The oaks and pines are a key feature of these gardens. Many, including the Stone Pine (*Pinus pinea*), are listed on Victoria's Register of Significant Trees. Another of these is the English Oak (*Quercus robur*), planted in 1863 to mark the marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales, is one of the oldest commemorative plantings in Victoria. Look up to appreciate their height, canopy spread and magnificence. Oaks and pines continue to be collected for their beauty, diversity and climate suitability.



Flora and fauna reserve

Tucked up in the gardens' north-west corner is the Flora and Fauna Reserve. This open woodland has state biological significance because it is one of a very small number of sites where the Eltham Copper Butterfly is found and where the butterfly's complex life cycle, involving a symbiotic relationship with Notoncus ants and Sweet Bursaria shrubs, remains viable.

Kept as part of the gardens by accident, it is a wonderful site for learning more about the local ecology, flora and ethnobotany.



Significant trees

Around the garden are trees regarded as significant because of their age, their rarity or their origins. Not all are original specimens. Some are successor plantings. Among them are the Guernsey Elm (*Ulmus minor* 'Sarniensis'), said to be one of two known such examples in Victoria. There's the largest known Indian Bean tree (*Catalpa bignonioides*) in Victoria, the gloriously named Weeping Elm (*Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdownii') which was planted in the 1870s, and the Large Leaf Linden (*Tilia platyphyllos*), one of only three such tree specimens in Victoria.



Alluvial terraces

The alluvial terraces rising along Barkers Creek are wetlands formed by cyclic erosion and depositing of sediments. Here a eucalypt-dominated woodland provides a canopy for diverse herbs and grasses underneath. Chief among the eucalypts is the River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). Other eucalypts found along these terraces include Grey Box (*E. microcarpa*), Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) and Yellow Gum (*E. leucoxylon*). Look out, too, for the Buloke (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*), an ironwood that produces one of the world's hardest timbers.



Dja Dja Wurrung Seasons

The Dja Dja Wurrung recognise six seasons, which are closely tied to the life cycles of local plants and animals.

When European first arrived in Australia, they brought their traditional concept of four seasons which was developed in the northern hemisphere: autumn, summer, spring and winter. Australia is a vastly different place to Europe, with unique weather patterns, plants and animals that are unique to Djaara country.



Rose gardens

Rose beds were added to these gardens in the 1960s under the guidance of Stan Wickham, the gardens' last live-in curator. They were introduced following the advocacy and fundraising efforts of the Develop Castlemaine and District Committee.

The rose collection includes 1950s and 1960s floribunda (bouquets on every branch) and hybrid tea (mostly single-stemmed) roses. Their inclusion remains the only significant design change to the gardens in the second half of the 20th century.



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Botanical
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