



Slow down and connect

A Guide to Wellbeing at
Royal Botanic Gardens
Melbourne

Illustrations by Claire Mosley





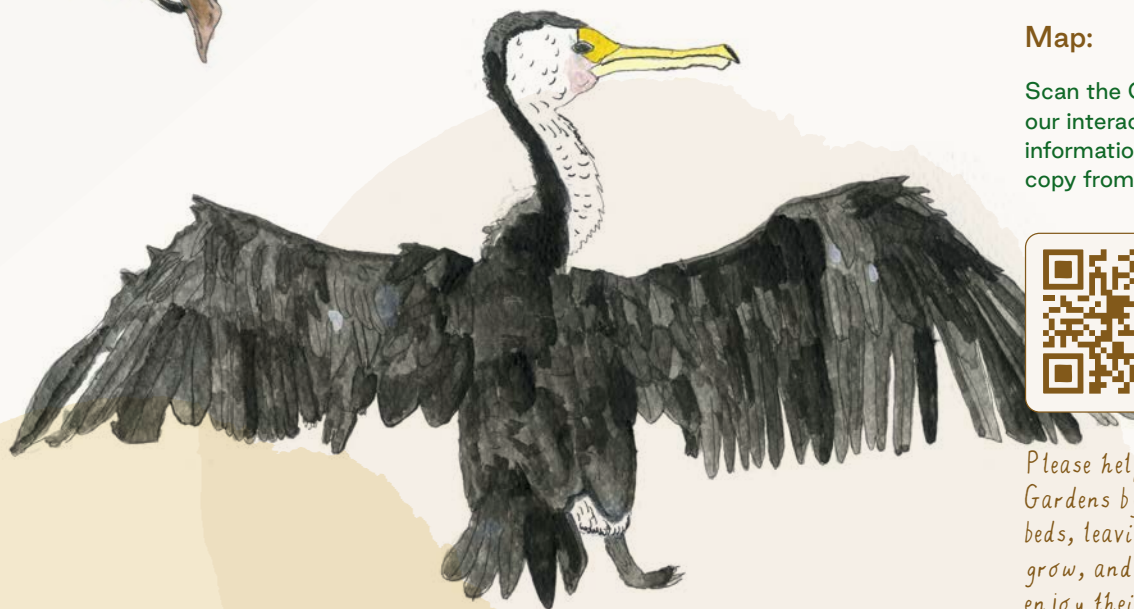
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which our two Gardens are situated: the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and acknowledge their continued custodianship and deep spiritual connection to these lands and waters. We honour the strength and richness of over 60,000 years of continuous Aboriginal culture and recognise the vital role of future generations as stewards of culture and Country.

Welcome

This booklet is designed for grown-ups to read along with young people as they explore. It aims to encourage wellbeing by helping visitors of all ages connect with the natural world at Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

Through simple mindfulness activities and sensory experiences, it encourages slowing down, noticing the beauty around us, and fostering a deeper sense of calm, curiosity and joy.

The experiences in this booklet are linked to evidence-based practices which support healthy bodies and minds.



How to use this Guide:

Explore a range of journeys to various precincts of Melbourne Gardens.

Allow 45 minutes or longer to explore each precinct at a gentle pace.

Estimated walking time to each precinct from the Visitor Centre:

Long Island:
15–20 min

Central Lake and Surrounds:
10–15 min

Arid and Drylands Precinct:
15–20 min

Map:

Scan the QR code to access our interactive map and more information, or pick up a hard copy from the Visitor Centre.



Please help us care for the Gardens by staying out of garden beds, leaving all plants where they grow, and letting the animals enjoy their homes undisturbed.



Imagine how this place would have been 200 years ago.

Long Island

The still waters, whispering grasses and ancient trees of Long Island channel a powerful connection to Country. Before colonisation, First Peoples knew this place as Tromgin, when the Birrarung (Yarra River) flowed through here, its waters and surrounding lagoons rich with fish, animals and plants. This area is deeply significant to the peoples of the Kulin Nation, who gathered here for tens of thousands of years to harvest resources and host ceremony. It's the perfect place to pause, listen, observe and reflect.



Seasonal Change –

look around you, what is happening in nature?
Which flowers are in bloom?
How are the animals behaving?
How might this be different in six months' time?

Search for scents along the pathways –

took out for River Mint, Tea Tree and Eucalyptus. Gently rub the leaves to release their smells.

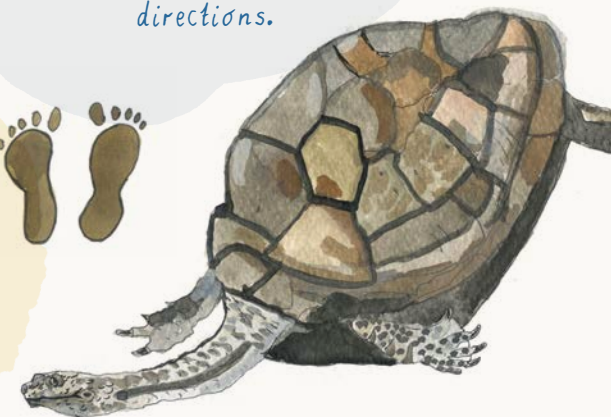


Listen to bird sounds –

find a spot to stop and sit while listening closely. Move from one sound to the next, listen in different directions.



Connect to First Peoples Perspectives: Walk in the footsteps along the pathway, and spot the animal tracks – who do you think has walked here before you?



Central Lake and Surrounds

This area is a beautiful space to slow down and connect with nature. It offers opportunities to relax on wide, open lawns with peaceful views across the lake, take time to explore the rich smells and textures of the Sensory, Herb and Medicinal Gardens, and wander through the cool, leafy sanctuary of Fern Gully.



Go on a rainbow ramble through the Sensory Garden – how many different colours can you find?



Take your nose on an adventure in the Herb and Medicinal Garden, gently rub the leaves to smell.

Did you know that plants release a special chemical which can help to regulate emotions, and boost our mood?

Find a comfortable spot to sit and enjoy the view across the lake –

spend 10 minutes observing the world around you.



Take a silent walk through Fern Gully – breathe deeply and listen to the water trickling through the landscape.

What is the quietest / furthest sound you can hear?

On Princes Lawn, try your hand at birdwatching.

How do different birds move, sound, behave?
I wonder why?





Arid and Drylands Precinct

This area offers a unique opportunity to explore climate-resilient plants, from the Australian Drylands Collection to the striking Arid Garden. As you make your way towards Tecoma Pavilion, you'll arrive at the perfect spot to pause, rest, and take in sweeping views of the city skyline.



Shadow Hunt:
Search for the most interesting, longest, or tiniest shadows in the garden.

What's making them?
Can you make an interesting shadow?



Move like an animal through the paths in the Australian Drylands.

Notice five beautiful things in nature



Reminder

Please stay out of the garden beds and leave habitats undisturbed.

These plants are tough—they've found clever ways to survive in harsh environments.

Can you think of a time when you had to be brave or keep going, even when it was hard?

You can do these things
anywhere in the Botanic
Gardens or near your home.

What do you like to do when
you're outside?



Things you can do anywhere in nature



Imagine you're a tiny creature.

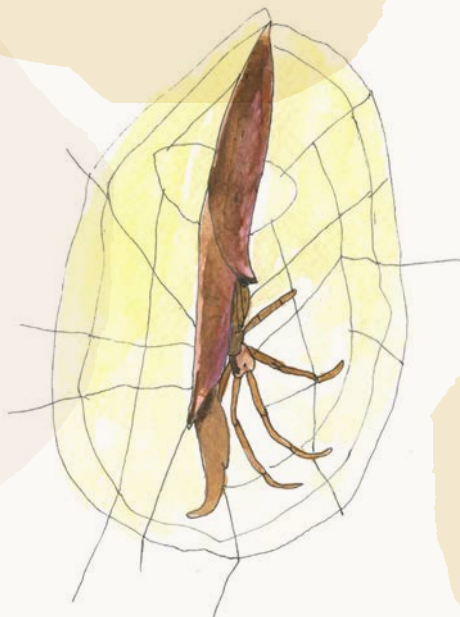
What would the grass look like?
Where would you hide, rest or find food?

Letting our imagination wander
like this builds our sense of wonder
and can help us build empathy and
problem-solving abilities.



Use your eyes like a magnifying glass.

Shift your focus from the big, open
landscape to the tiny world around you—
look closely at textures, colours, and
hidden details. Focusing on small things
in nature can help quiet our minds, reduce
stress, and help us to feel grounded.



Try balancing on a fallen log
or stepping across stones—
feel how your body adjusts and
moves to stay steady.

Activities like this help build
body awareness, coordination,
confidence and focus.



Gently spin in a circle and
notice how it feels when
you stop.

This movement wakes up
our sense of balance and can
help our brains feel more
alert and organised.



Use your nose to explore.

Can you find something earthy,
sweet or strange? Noticing natural
scents can help calm our minds
and bring our attention into the
present moment.





Look around and gather natural materials in different colours—leaves, petals, bark, sticks or seed pods that have already fallen.

Arrange them to make a rainbow or colour pattern.

Focusing on colours and textures can help us feel present and connected to the world.



Lie back and watch the clouds drift by.

Notice their shapes, colours, and how they slowly change. Let your mind wander and imagine stories or creatures in the sky.

This kind of slow, open-ended play can help our minds enter a restful and imaginative state.



Things you can do anywhere in nature



Listen carefully in every direction—North, South, East, West, Up and Down. What sounds can you hear?

Tuning into the sounds around us can help quiet our thoughts, calm our bodies, and deepen our connection with nature.



Take your time to touch and explore—can you find some different textures in nature? Notice how some feel rough, smooth, soft, or bumpy.

Feeling these textures helps bring our attention to the present moment and can help us to feel grounded.

Take a moment to 'read' a tree by looking closely at its bark, branches, leaves, and the life around it.

What stories might it tell?





Eucalyptus

Common flora and fauna



Banksia



Eastern Long-Neck Turtle



Oak

Fungi



Everlasting Daisies



Purple Swamp Hen

of Melbourne Gardens



Moreton Bay Fig



Pied Cormorant

Imperial Tezebel Butterfly



Leaf-curling Spider



Native Grasses



Xanthorrhoea



*Once you're finished with
this booklet we encourage you
to gift it to another person.*

Thanks for taking the time to slow down
and explore Melbourne Gardens.
We hope it has helped you to connect
with the natural world.

What are you inspired to do in nature now?

For more information on the theory
behind these experiences, visit
www.rbg.vic.gov.au/learn

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