

Route 1 – General visit (Self-guided tour)

Length: 3.75 km.

Time (without stops): 60 minutes.

Time (entire tour): 120 minutes.

Drinking water

Suggested route

Milestone

Information panel

Views

Toilets

This self-guided tour aims to provide a general visit around the collections of the Botanic Garden starting and finishing at the same point. This leaflet offers information about the location of the different elements, it is therefore not a description or a detailed list of plants but an invitation to subsequent tours, which can be completed with specific booklets, workshops or courses held periodically.

For more information visit: www.botanicoalcala.es

Entering the Botanic Garden through the main building, we will have access to a broad avenue flanked by young lime trees which defines the axis of the garden and is an extension of the hangars. The avenue divides the *Systematic Schools of Regional Flora (Escuelas Sistemáticas de Flora Regional)* (1) into two different plots where species from Madrid and Guadalajara are taxonomically organized in a young collection which was established in 2008. Something that draws the attention is the fact that there are trees in the first parterres only, which contain families of trees from our region.

On the right side of the building there is a small stairway which leads to the *Wetland (Humedal)* (2) where a vast settlement of bullrush and reeds appears above the surface of the water. Mallards, coots, grebes, kingfishers, common stilts, grey herons and many other birds find shelter here.

Ascending via a slate path, beneath the pergola on our right, we will arrive at the *lake viewpoint (mirador del lago)* (3). A white poplar provides shade for a great view of the Botanic Garden. From here, we can take the road flanked by strawberry trees, which are eaten by birds, rabbits and hares. We will pass by the underground irrigation systems, one of which acts as a shelter and a place for exhibitions and we will reach the Environmental Education Classroom of the *Iberian Arboretum (Arboreto Ibérico)* (4), equipped for children's activities. This grove (4) consists of a collection of trees that grow naturally in our country: holm oaks, oaks, poplars, willows, elm trees, etc., accompanied by a collection of shrubs which are found alongside these trees.

Westwards, we will pass through an iron pergola covered with climbing roses (5) into the *Rose Garden (Rosaleda)*. Angel Esteban donated his roses in 2003, his life's work. The Rose Garden contains 3,500 specimens of almost 600 different varieties, some of which date back to the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but most are from the early twentieth century. 285 of these varieties are unique and can be found in this collection only. Near the main square of the rose garden, on the first eastern parterre, we will find the '*Comunidad de Madrid*' Rose, dedicated, in 2004, to all locals who admire the beauty of nature. If we continue our tour through the central path of the *Rose Garden*, towards the tunnel of Cycads at the rear, we will find, on the left, framed by three small columns, the '*Peace Rose*' (6), which in 2007 was dedicated to all the victims of terrorist violence.

Leaving the *Rose Garden* we face the *Tunnel of Cycads (Túnel de Cicadales)* (7), with a very unique group of plants, true living fossils that appeared on Earth before the dinosaurs, about 270 million years ago.

They still exist but are not very common. Although they look like small palm trees with incipient trunks, cycads are a real type of gymnosperms very close relatives of conifers. That is why this group of plants has been placed within the *Arboretum of Conifers (Arboreto de Coníferas)* (8) as they have strobili or reproductive cones arranged in different individuals: male or female, producing pollen and seeds respectively. In the *Arboretum of Conifers* we can find numerous species of other gymnosperms: the conifers, which grow naturally in our country, along with many other exotic plants and those used in gardening. We will see trees with unique forms: twisted, with needle-like or scaly leaves, with strange cones or with gray, golden or blue cones, etc. We will also discover an example of a third group of gymnosperms: the *Ginkgo biloba*, the only species that has survived, thanks to the work of Chinese monks who had been planting it in the monasteries for thousands of years. It has fan-shaped leaves which appear to be identical to the fossils from 150 million years ago.

Continuing the tour westwards, we will arrive at the *Exotic Arboretum (Arboreto de Exóticas)* (9), a collection of trees that do not belong to our region, with some species not well-known in Spain and new varieties obtained in nurseries, an exotic shrub collection and other shrubs obtained artificially.

Finishing our tour around the *Arboretum* we should descend westwards, following the path parallel to the A2 Road and through the valley between artificial hills that were constructed to block noise from the motorway. The *Vegetal Communities (Comunidades Vegetales)* (10) of the regional flora collection are found on these hills. This collection represents the species as they grow in nature, mainly as riverside vegetation. We will descend the dry stream, an excavated channel where the stones mark the boundary, and we will arrive at the *Elm grove (Olmedas)* (11). We will return northwards across a small path, skirting the hills up to a *small pond* (12) which we can cross via a wooden bridge. Water is pumped from this pond using the *power module* (13) that we will see on our left, generated by solar panels and a wind turbine. This module is used for education about clean energy sources. Water flows from the highest point forming a narrow artificial stream.

Continuing our ascent and crossing the birth of the stream we will reach the *Arboretum viewpoint (mirador del arboreto)* (14) where the route continues down an avenue of stone pines. On the left a path surrounds a magnificent elm that leads to the *bird observatory (observatorio de aves)* (15) where we can watch the anatids going in and out of the reedbed or the assiduous grey heron scanning the lakebed in search of fish. Following the path we will reach the *Linnaeus Memorial* (16). In the square there is a permanent exhibition about the life and work of this Swedish naturalist to whom we owe the establishment of the binomial nomenclature of species.

Descending the pine avenue, we will see the *Auditory (Auditorio)* on our right, a meeting point where concerts, performances and other events are sometimes held. To our left we can access the *panoramic platform* (17), where a succession of small waterfalls creates a murmur of water as the water is oxygenated and where we can observe the lake more closely.

Further down, we will cross the lime tree avenue where we started our tour. On our right, an area (18) designated for the future construction of new exhibition greenhouses, dedicated to the cacti and succulent plants collection, currently divided between the nurseries, the minitropicalarium, several tunnels and shaded areas.

At the end of the lime tree avenue toilets are located on the left hand side (19). Skirting the fence we enter the *Organic Vegetable Garden (Huerta Ecológica)*. The main entrance is in front of the *henhouse (gallinero)* (20) where the traditional breed of hens 'Black Castilian' ('*Castellana Negra*') are housed.

This species is endangered due to the entry of more profitable American breeds. Following the path flanked by white poplars we will arrive at the composting area, still in the *Organic Vegetable Garden*. Several posters explain the processes by which compost is produced.

Inside the *Organic Vegetable Garden*, apart from the traditional horticultural area, which contains around 50 different varieties of fruits and vegetables, are the most common fruit trees of the region. We can also observe numerous edible and useful plants like wicker or lavender which are used in perfumes, soaps and air fresheners. Likewise, it includes a tunnel with a variety of kitchen herbs.

This *Vegetable Garden* is certified by the Committee on 'Organic Agriculture of the Comunidad de Madrid'. Its purpose is to restore and preserve the richness and variety of the species that were grown in this region, which are being replaced by more profitable species and by the abandonment of traditional family farming. It is open to the public on weekday mornings only but it is enclosed by a low fence which allows viewing from outside.

It should be noted that the poplars that flank the path were planted in 1999 by students from all over the world to commemorate the 500th Anniversary of the University of Alcalá. Note that there are plaques commemorating the event under each tree. In front of the henhouse a path that leads to the highest point of the Botanic Garden with the *gazebo (mirador de la colina)* (21) at the top, from here we can observe the whole garden. Ascending we will pass through the *Vegetal Communities* again: the Alta Alacarría and the Parameras de Sigüenza and then through the Parameras de Molina and Alto Tajo, upon our descent. This hill was constructed with contributions of land from local builders between 1997 and 1999 and the plantations began in 2000.

From here, there is a magnificent view of the lower terrace of the garden and the best view of the *World Flora* or the *Taxonomic Garden (Jardín Taxonómico)* and the *Nurseries (Viveros)* at the south, between this hill and the Instituto Geográfico. Unfortunately, the experience is disturbed by intense noise coming from the motorway, which is quite close.

We will descend to the pond that lies under the gazebo and we will turn right and cross a square with a plane-tree in the middle. We will enter an area of 3 hectares delimited by a low concrete wall. This area was the first Botanic Garden in 1991. On our left we can see the greenhouses and an irrigation tank. Behind them we will see the nurseries with planting tables, shade houses, production greenhouses, stores, etc. If we turn right, alongside the concrete wall, we can contemplate the *Flora Mundial (World Flora)* collection (22), arranged by families or genus in 30 parterres. This was the first collection planted in the Botanic Garden, aimed to showcase diverse samples from all around the world which can acclimatize to this region. The collection has over 3,000 plants of about 1,500 different species, and as such it is already nearing maximum capacity, limited by the shade of higher trees.

After our tour around the *Taxonomic Garden*, we will face a quadrangular square (23) in front of the irrigation tank mentioned above. Here it is the *minitropicarium*, the *tunnel of cacti* and the *rockery of succulent plants*. The *minitropicarium* is a small greenhouse of 400 m², which consists of two small rooms: one devoted to the cacti and succulent plants collection and the other room devoted to the tropical plant collection. This room, which was excavated to allow for more height space, includes orchids and epiphyte plants. In the future, this collection of cacti will be moved to the new exhibition greenhouses leaving more space to the orchids and tropical plants, changing its name to the '*Orchidarium*' and losing its connotation of 'mini'.

The *tunnel of cacti*, beside the greenhouse contains some examples which are 25-30 years old. It involves a recreation of how these plants will be planted after the construction of the future greenhouses. Both the tunnel and the *tropicarium* can only be visited on weekday mornings. Any of the

gardeners will be pleased to open them if they are closed.

Leaving the quadrangular square, which also provides access to the nurseries, we will return again to the plane-tree square nearby. We will turn right this time, across the *Regional Flora Park* with plant communities from the Campiña and the Baja Alcarria to arrive at the basic facilities: the toilets, stores and our Environmental Education classrooms. We will take the small *path* on left (24) crossing a small wooden bridge (25) over the wetland plants. At the end of the path we will find the white poplars again, just in front of the compost bins of the Vegetable Garden. Continuing clockwise through the path skirting the Vegetable Garden and turning left, we will arrive at a wooded area: the *Outdoor Classroom*, with lawns, shade and picnic tables. Finally, we will head back to the main building of the Botanic Garden, where he started this tour, passing through the field where the *Vineyard* is under construction (26). We will also see an old well which currently holds the *Winehouse (Bodega)* (27), where wine is made from the grapes that grow in the Garden in line with organic farming standards.

Just before the main building, in front of the Winehouse there is an area under construction. The kerbs and paths represent the three historic courtyards of the Universidad de Cisneros, currently the Rectorado de la Universidad. This new garden will be devoted to the apothecary plants and will be called the *Jardines Cisnerianos* (28), which hopefully will be one of the most attractive and notable parts of the Botanic Garden.