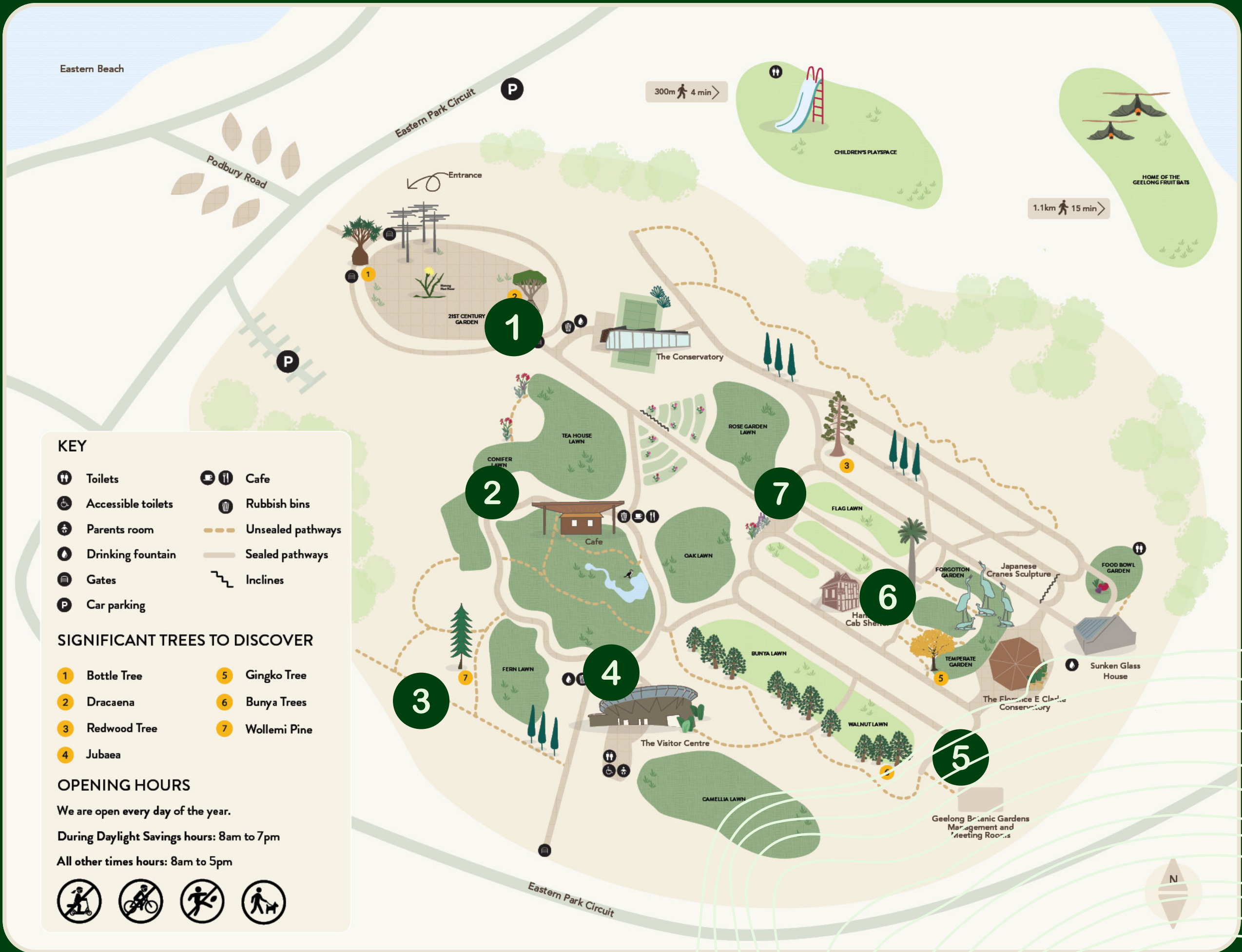


GEELONG
BOTANIC
GARDENS



FREE SELF-GUIDED TRAILS

A WALK FOR WELBEING





1. A PAUSED MOMENT

Take a moment to pause and settle onto the rocks in the 21st Garden bowl. Tune in to what you can hear and see around you. Is there movement in the pond, perhaps frogs close by?

The soak in the 21st Garden is designed to mirror the natural rhythm of the seasons. In winter, it fills with rainwater, supporting a rich habitat for birds, frogs, and plant life. Across Geelong and the Bellarine, many ecosystems rely on landscapes like this, shaped by cycles of abundance and dryness, a natural boom-and-bust pattern, that brings renewal.

A natural reset, listening to nature can have powerful benefits. Natural sounds are known to reduce stress, slow heart rates, ease anxiety, improve focus, lift mood, and help guide us into a calmer, more relaxed state of mind.

2. SCENTED MEMORIES

Scented memories – Wander through the pelargoniums along the South African border. Keep an eye out for the “smell me” sign, gently pick a small leaf and crush it between your fingers. What do you notice? Mint, chocolate, lemon, peppermint?

Pelargoniums belong to the Geraniaceae family. They are hardy, adaptable plants, well known for their rich and varied scents. Native to the Cape regions of South Africa, they were introduced to Europe in the early 1600s and later became popular in France, where their fragrant oils were distilled for use in perfumery, a practice that continues around the world today.

What memories do these scents recall?



3. REFLECTIVE MOMENTS

Wander through the Pacific Rim Garden, home to a remarkable collection of rare and threatened gymnosperms. These ancient plants were among the first seed-bearing species to evolve over 385 million years ago. Their name comes from Greek, meaning ‘naked seed,’ reflecting the way their seeds develop without a protective covering.

Today, gymnosperms are among the most threatened plant groups, with around 1,000 species remaining worldwide and more than 40 per cent at risk of extinction. This includes Australia’s own Wollemi Pine (*Wollemia nobilis*), a living fossil.

As you explore, see if you can spot these rare species. Imagine how this garden will transform over time, what will it look like in 30 years, when these young saplings have reached their full height? Some may tower up to 20 m above you.





4. FOCUS ON FRACTALS

Wander through the fernery and listen to the gentle sounds of the waterfall and flowing creek. Can you hear birdsong nearby? Look closely, can you spot a tightly curled fern frond? Pause and take in the intricate patterns.

Did you know that many forms in nature follow mathematical patterns called fractals, shapes that repeat at every scale? Fern fronds are a beautiful example. Research suggests that observing these natural patterns can help reduce stress, gently shifting the brain into an alpha wave state, the same calm, relaxed state often reached during meditation.

5. RELAX IN TIME

Find a place to lie back beneath the Ginkgo and look up into its canopy. Are there any golden autumn leaves still clinging to the branches? Notice the gnarled limbs, softened with moss and lichen. Some ginkgo trees are believed to live for over 1,000 years, this one is just beginning its journey, planted in 1859 and now 167 years old.

Ginkgo biloba is the last surviving member of an ancient lineage dating back around 270 million years. Fossil evidence of a ginkgo ancestor from 110 million years ago has been found in the Otway Ranges, with others discovered across Australia. Native to China and now considered endangered in the wild.

Close your eyes and take a moment to relax. Can you imagine this tree on its 1,000th birthday? What might it look like? What will Geelong have become, and how many people will have passed beneath its branches over time?



6. THE LITTLE THINGS

Check the map and wander into a quieter corner of the garden. What do you notice, are the plants different? What are they growing in? Can you catch that rich, earthy scent in the air?

That smell is known as petrichor, the fresh, grounding fragrance often noticed after rain, especially following a warm day. The term was coined by Australian scientists, drawing from Greek: *petra*, meaning "stone," and *ichor*, the ethereal blood of the gods.

Though invisible, it's all around you, created by tiny soil-dwelling bacteria, mainly *Streptomyces* which release a compound called geosmin.

This scent can have a powerful effect on our wellbeing. It's known to reduce stress, spark emotional memories, and lift our mood.

Take a slow breath in... and relax.



7. FIND HAPPINESS IN YOUR OWN GARDEN

Ask any horticulturist and they'll tell you—it's the best job in the world. And that's in part to dirt they work with.

Beneath your feet, the soil holds a remarkable microbe called *Mycobacterium vaccae*. When we dig, plant, or simply touch the earth, this microbe can stimulate the release of serotonin, the brain chemical linked to happiness and wellbeing.

The sights, smells, and textures of gardening create a rich sensory experience that can lift your mood, spark positive emotions, and deepen your connection to the natural world.

As you wander through the garden, consider how you might bring a piece of this experience home. Perhaps it's by connecting more deeply with nature or spending time tending your own garden

8. BREATHE WITH THE GARDEN

Find a quiet place to sit or stand comfortably.

Begin by noticing your breath, just as it is.

No need to change anything yet. Now, gently slow it down.

Breathe in through your nose for a count of four...

Hold for a moment...

Then breathe out slowly for a count of six.

Repeat this a few times, letting each exhale soften your body.

As you breathe, imagine you are breathing with the garden.

Inhale the scents, the freshness, the life around you...

Exhale any tension, letting it drift away.

If your mind wanders, that's okay. Simply bring your attention back to your breath.

Even a few slow breaths like this can calm the nervous system, ease the body, and bring you back into the present moment.



9. CARRY IT WITH YOU

As you come to the end of the trail, take a moment to reflect.

What did you notice today? A sound, a scent, a feeling, a small detail you might otherwise have missed?

Wellbeing doesn't always come from big changes. Often, it's found in small, quiet moments of connection, like the ones you've experienced here.

Before you leave, choose one thing to carry with you. Perhaps it's taking a slow breath, noticing birdsong, or pausing to feel the sun on your skin. The garden will continue to grow and change, just as you do.

And whenever you need it, you can return, or simply step outside, take a breath, and begin again.