

# The gardens of the University



UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA



ENGLISH





# Welcome to the University of Barcelona gardens

There are three features that make the gardens of the Historic Building of the University of Barcelona particularly attractive. In the first place, they are of historical interest as they were laid out at the same time as the building was built, between 1863 and some time after 1871, the year when the building entered use. Secondly, as will be seen, they exhibit some of the elements of a botanic garden. Finally, they are one of the most important open spaces in Barcelona's Eixample district. The architect who directed construction of the University building also designed the general layout of the gardens, which should therefore be understood as both complementing and being complemented by the building itself, even though they have been subsequently replanted and undergone various changes, many of them a consequence of modifications to the surrounding buildings.



**Historical aspects.** A botanic garden was created on land given by Antoni de Meca, Marquis of Ciutadilla, near carrer de la Cera in the old city in 1784, with explicit instructions that it should be used to lay out a garden linked to the Reial Col·legi de Cirurgia (the Royal College of Surgery) and that it should be of use for teaching botany. Later, between 1830 and 1846, the Reial Col·legi de Farmàcia de Sant Victorià (the Royal College of Pharmacy of St Victorianus) also had a small botanic garden in carrer d'Escudellers. Between 1837 and 1842, after the University had returned to Barcelona from Cervera – the inland town to which it had been banished by King Philip V to punish the city for its resistance and to reward Cervera for its support during the War of the Spanish Succession in the early 18th century – the institution was housed in the former Convent of Carme, which had been disentailed, and the monastery garden was transformed into one that could be used for teaching scientific and pharmaceutical subjects. This installation, created between 1846 and 1849, adopted the formal layout of a botanic garden, and from 1847 to 1868 the director, appointed by the University's rector, was a well-known figure: Antoni Cebrià Costa i Cuixart, professor of Botany in the Science Section of the Faculty of Philosophy and master to a whole generation of science and pharmacy

Views of the University  
of Barcelona gardens



Between the Arts and Science Courts

graduates, who together established what is known as the modern Catalan school of Botany. Costa used the garden to obtain supplies of plants for classes and even published a number of *Index Seminum*, small books in which botanic gardens offered seeds for exchange and presented information on their collections and on new flowers. As Costa left the University in 1868 he did not carry out his functions in the new building, but he most probably directed the removal of some trees from the old gardens to the new ones, which are the main subject of

this leaflet. There are no *in situ* remains of the gardens of the Colleges of Surgery and Pharmacy, nor of the mid-nineteenth century University gardens in existence today. Hence, the gardens around plaça de la Universitat are the only record, albeit very slight, of Barcelona's oldest botanic garden. Although the gardens in existence today were not actually planted as a botanic garden, they were used for obtaining plant materials for teaching purposes from the moment they were laid out until the time of the Autonomous University under the Spanish Republic (1933-39), when Professor Pius Font i Quer taught Botany in the Faculty of Pharmacy. At various moments the gardens have been open to the public, as they are today, which is why this text has been written as a guide, so that people can relax in them and enjoy the peace and quiet they offer in addition to broadening their knowledge of the plants they contain.

With the aim of continuing to make all these activities possible, especially the last one, this leaflet offers a suggested itinerary that stops to examine certain plants. As it would be impossible to mention all the species to be found in the gardens, we have chosen a number of them for different reasons: in some cases because of their significance within the Mediterranean landscape; in others, in contrast, because of their exotic nature; in a number of cases because of their uses, or some detail (such as their size or age), which makes one example or another particularly remarkable.

Aerial view of the Historic Building and the gardens



## Suggested itinerary

It is suggested that visitors should cross the gardens from the modern teaching block adjoining carrer d'Aribau as far as the car-park alongside carrer de Balmes. Between these two points, they can enter and leave the building itself in order to see the Arts and Science Courts. These Courts also contain important plants and can therefore be considered to form part of the gardens.



Solanaceae (*Solandra maxima*) on the wall that gives onto plaça de la Universitat adjoining carrer d'Aribau



Path along the rear façade of the building



View of the pond behind the building

## Zone I >

Plaça de la Universitat / Aribau

The wall that gives onto plaça de la Universitat adjoining carrer d'Aribau has several noteworthy plants. They are not the most luxuriant in the gardens, but we should note a carob tree (*Ceratonia siliqua*) and an olive tree (*Olea europaea*), symbolising the local vegetation and Mediterranean crops. In addition, there are some magnificent examples of the Ombu (*Phytolacca dioica*) (photo1) and some medical and toxic solanaceae (*Solandra maxima*, the cup-of-gold or golden chalice vine, and the trumpet-shaped flowers of *Datura arborea*), which apart from being eye-catching, provide a link with the Americas via their origins.

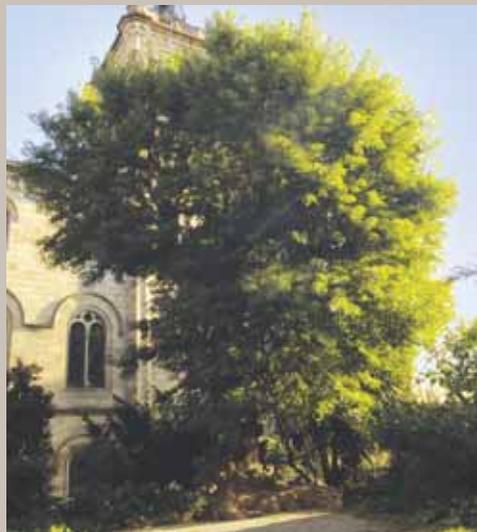


photo 1



## Zone 2 >

Aribau / towards Diputació

If we move from this first space towards carrer de la Diputació, we will find to our right a bitter orange tree (*Citrus aurantium*). This plant of Asiatic origin has come to be cultivated in the Mediterranean area for many purposes, and there are a number of examples in the gardens of the UB: it can be found, for example, in the Arts Court and by the way out to carrer de Balmaes. Leaving the entrance to the Arts Court to our right, the luxuriant cascading foliage of a pepper tree (*Schinus molle*), of South American origin, the fruit of which is used as a condiment, indicates the route to follow (photo 2). Slightly further on, we will find an example of a tree that is old in all senses of the word: a ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*), which is well over a hundred years old and which in fact belongs to a species that is a living fossil, a relic of the distant past. In addition to being decorative, it has medicinal uses. Almost in the angle of the avenue leading into the gardens there is a cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*); this

Mediterranean tree, a symbol of hospitality, is planted profusely in all this area. Before the cypress, we see a large Balearic box (*Buxus balearica*), another example of which can be found slightly further on.



photo 2

## Zone 3 >

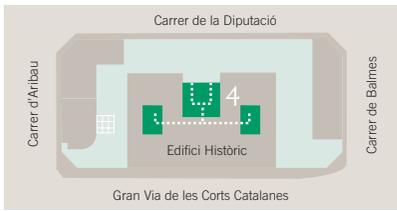
Diputació, behind the Arts Court



photo 3

As the gardens turn to the right, parallel to carrer de la Diputació, two trees stand out. First, the common yew (*Taxus baccata*), a highly toxic tree with some medicinal purposes and edible parts (although it is best not to put this to the test, unless you know it well)

that is to be found in cooler parts of Catalonia. It is of majestic bearing and also very decorative, above all when its red arils, its fruit, contrast with the dark green of its foliage; several examples can be found at different points of the gardens (photo 3). Secondly, there is the camphor tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*), an Asiatic tree with sweet-smelling leaves, reminding us of its application. Almost next to carrer de la Diputació, we find two clear representatives of Mediterranean flora: the ornamental chastetree or chasteberry (*Vitus agnus-castus*), also with medicinal uses, and the fig tree (*Ficus carica*), with its edible fruit. Not far away, the date palms (*Phoenix dactylifera*), the fruit of which is also edible and whose leaves are used for various forms of handicraft, provide an African link. And from there we can catch a glimpse of Australia, represented by several examples, though perhaps not the lushest ones, of the eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), a wood-producing tree that bears leaves with medicinal properties.



## Zone 4 >

The Arts and Science Courts and the area connecting



photo 4

From the previous area, after passing alongside the pond, we gain access to the passageway connecting the two courtyards of the building. There we will see several yews and a cypress among other plants, and at the end a fine Himalayan cedar (*Cedrus deodara*). If we leave this cedar behind and go towards the right, we will enter the Arts Court, where we find cypresses, a Banyan tree (*Ficus bengalensis*) and four bitter orange trees placed around the pond. From the Arts Court we head towards the Science Court. There we see several cypresses and, above all, an impressive southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), originally from North America, even though it bears the name of an Occitan botanist, Magnol, as well as an equally noteworthy India rubber tree (*Ficus elastica*), from the Indian subcontinent (photo 4). Several more magnolias can be found elsewhere in the gardens, for example, around the greenhouse.

## Zone 5 >

Diputació, towards Balmes

Retracing our steps, we go back past the cedar, the cypress and the yews again, and towards the end we turn to the right, towards carrer de Balmes and parallel to carrer de la Diputació. Just as we turn, we see a remarkable ombu and a yew. Afterwards, the Mediterranean once again



photo 5

makes its presence felt with a cork oak (*Quercus suber*), perhaps not quite as exuberant as many, an umbrella pine (*Pinus pinea*) and a holm oak (*Quercus ilex*). If we continue towards the greenhouse, we will see a broad-leafed lime or umbrella pine (*Pinus pinea*), an ornamental European tree with medicinal properties, and also another well-known tree: a common jujube (*Ziziphus jujuba*), another example of which awaits us at the end of the path. This is a Mediterranean and Middle Eastern tree producing edible fruit. In Catalonia, however, its wood has another use: to make tenor shawms and other musical instruments for 'cobles', the groups accompanying the dancing of the 'sardana'. Not far from this tree, a Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*), from New Zealand, transports us to the southern hemisphere (photo 5). Slightly further on, just after the greenhouse, a number of cacti (*Cereus peruvianus*) and agaves (*Agave ferox*), represent the drier parts of America.



The trumpet-shaped flowers of *Datura arborea*, next to carrer Aribau

## Zone 6 >

Plaça de la Universitat / Balmes

From this point, we should head towards the gate that opens onto the junction of Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes and carrer de Balmes. We leave behind several large common oleanders (*Nerium oleander*), which are typically Mediterranean as well as being both



photo 6

decorative and toxic. We will find a beautiful jacaranda or Brazilian rosewood tree (*Jacaranda mimosaeifolia*), a South American plant with eye-catching blue flowers, a good example of a yew, together with several white mulberry trees (*Morus alba*), a tree from China, often planted for ornamental purposes, whose leaves are used to raise silkworms. The slope leading down Gran Via has the remains of what must have been an attractive grove of orange trees. To finish the route, if we go towards carrer de Balmes, we can admire, in addition to some more magnolias and ombus, a honeylocust tree or three-thorned acacia (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) of North American origin (photo 6), and a pittosporum or Japanese mock orange (*Pittosporum tobira*), from the Far East, of remarkable size and shape.

## Your own route around the gardens

This route has offered an introduction to the gardens of the historic building of the University of Barcelona. In a small space and a short time we have visited the five continents and called to mind many of the uses of these plants beyond the purely ornamental function, which is the main purpose of all the examples to be found here. We invite you now to repeat the itinerary and undertake others so as to discover the more than 300 species to be found in this space and to seek out their names, origins, uses, dangers, symbolism and everything that may be significant in the relationship between human beings and the plant world. In this way you can make this privileged corner in the centre of the city of Barcelona a space of your own.

Author of the texts: Joan Vallès Xirau





The coat of arms of the University of Barcelona following its restoration to the city in 1842 with the blazons of all the Catalan provinces and those of the Balearic Islands



Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes, 585  
08007 Barcelona  
Tel. (+34) 934 021 100  
[www.ub.edu](http://www.ub.edu)

With the cooperation of:

Ajuntament  de Barcelona

Parcs i Jardins