This dramatic and innovative garden was opened in 2002. After a long period of drought, the 21st Century Garden was designed to show how plants could survive a low-water situation, under the themes of:

- Regional relevance: local indigenous plants survive with little water
- Plant adaptation: how plants adapt to drought
- Plant evolution: how plants have evolved in different environments

As you walk through the garden, see the variety of ways that plants save water. There are leaves and stems that are thick and store water (succulents), leaves that hang down to minimise exposure to hot sun, those with thick waxy coatings and those that are light grey to reflect some of the light. Hidden from our eyes some plants minimise water loss by taking in carbon dioxide when it is dark and cool. They then use sunlight during the day to convert stored carbon dioxide into sugars, to support growth and flowering.

1. **Outside the gates**, the regional theme begins in the boat-shaped beds which line the drive: they show a range of grassland plants indigenous to the Geelong area, including dianellas, patersonias, sedges and grasses (Kangaroo Grass *Themeda triandra* photo [1], wallaby grass, blue grass, etc). From the steps, look down to the sea. The fence, sculptures and boat-shaped deck at the gates are designed to link the gardens to the nearby waterfront.

2. The **bottle trees** *Brachychiton rupestris* photo [2] show how trees can store water in their trunks to survive drought. Look over the landscape of the garden. There are no lawns here. Local granitic sand and local rocks feature in the large excavated basin. The aquatic soak is designed to fill and empty with the weather. All of the plants are tough and hardy, needing very little water.

3. **Regional flora**: Turn left, following the path along the edge of the basin. The plants on your left are all from Eastern Australia. In spring there are many with colourful or aromatic flowers. The last bed on the left features plants from various islands, near Australia and further afield. (Phillip Island Hibiscus *Hibiscus insularis* photo [3b]). On your right, on the sloping bank, are beds showing local Coastal, Heathland, Ranges and Grassland plants (see map). Grass trees *Xanthorrhoea* are visible on both sides of the path: one tall specimen outside the fence photo [3a] is thought to be hundreds of years old.

4. More bottle trees are in the **Survival Mechanisms Bed**, along with many other Australian drought resistant plants. These often have tough small or grey leaves which lose less water in the heat – or thick succulent stems which hold water. The next bed contains plants which are **Rare or Threatened in Australia**. Botanic Gardens always strive to conserve and protect plants which are at risk. One such plant is the **Dragon Tree** *Dracaena draco* photo [4]: this species from the Canary Islands is now endangered. The plant came to Eastern Park in the 1800s and is now an historic icon in the 21st Century Garden.

5. The next bed is planted with species used for food by our first people, the **Wathaurong** or **Wadawurrung**. In fact, almost all of the native plants in the 21st Century Garden were used for food, medicine or tools by the aboriginal people. (Spiny-headed Mat Rush *Lomandra longifolia* photo [5])

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Map on back of card.

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6. Continuing back toward the front gates on the other side, there are examples of drought resistant plants from other countries: agaves, aloes and cactus, salvias, succulents and a different “bottle tree”, the Silk Floss Tree *Ceiba speciosa* photo [6]. Plants from arid regions of Queensland and Central Australia are further along on the right-hand side. In summer, on the left, the colourful Australian *Buckinghamia* and *Stenocarpus* (Fire Wheel Tree) may be in bloom.

7. Also on the left are plantings of trees and shrubs descended from ancestors on the ancient land-mass of Gondwana, millions of years ago. When the continents broke away, the plants developed differently in New Zealand, South America, New Caledonia, Africa and Australia: the changes which developed through Plant Evolution can be observed here. Notice the differing forms of araucaria, agathis and afrocarpus: the labels give their names and country of origin. On both sides of the path are ancient Cycads photo [7], which have not changed much in appearance since the time of the dinosaurs.

8. Just before the decking, on the right, is the Buckley Falls Bed, showing the trees and shrubs indigenous to the Barwon River area. They have thrived here with minimal water. (Sweet Bursaria *Bursaria spinosa* photo [8])

The 21st Century Garden uses less than 1% of the water used in the older part of the gardens. To appreciate the contrast, walk back east through the Hansen gates: the traditional lush green lawns and European shrubs of the 20th and 19th Century Gardens are cool and inviting, but they do need a lot of water!