The outdoor gardens are open daily from dawn to dusk. Please note that the gardens contain uneven and hilly terrain with unpaved paths. Feel free to leave the paved path. Please clean up after your dog and avoid picking flowers or climbing trees.
Start your tour at the Wellesley College Botanic Gardens Visitor Center (31), adjacent to the Margaret Ferguson Greenhouses (29). The numbers refer to locations on the map.

The Cameron Garden (30) in the courtyard adjacent to the Visitor Center (31) is a sensory garden filled with fragrant plants and anchored by a Japanese cryptomeria (Cryptomeria japonica).

Walk through the greenhouse potting area, the outdoor area between the greenhouse ranges, past the Research House and exit the door at the end. The Kitchen Garden (28), the fenced garden between the greenhouses and Science Center, is planted with a varying selection of food crops in support of College courses and Botanic Gardens programs.

Across from the Visitor Center and above the stone wall is the Creighton Educational Garden (23), containing three major types of plantings. To the left of the stairs, a butterfly garden supports butterflies known to occur in the vicinity of Wellesley by providing caterpillar host plants and nectar plants. A small scree garden highlighting alpine plants is planted atop the right end of the wall. A diverse array of over 50 dwarf and miniature conifers can be found to the right of the stairs. This garden has been named a reference garden by the American Conifer Society.

Wild type (typical) specimens of many of the conifers in this garden can be found in other areas of the Botanic Gardens.

Walk up the stairs and turn to the left to view the fenced Climate Change Monitoring Garden (24). This garden is one of five across the United States that have been planted with identical clones of seven different plant species, each represented by specimens from four climate zones. Observations of leaf-out, bud burst and other life-cycle events are collected and compared with past years and data from the other monitoring gardens.

Cross the road and descend the stairs to enter the H. H. Hunnewell Arboretum, named for Horatio Hollis Hunnewell, who popularized and cultivated rhododendrons and donated many to the College.

To the right are planted a variety of Japanese maples (Acer palmatum). Walk along this grassed allée to find the hidden Grotto (22) on the right, planted with moisture-loving plants.

Return to the allée and walk diagonally to an opening in the plantings. Follow this to the Woodland Pond (20). Notable plants in this area include the Franklin tree (Franklinia alatamaha).

The large grassy area to the west of the Woodland Pond, dominated by a tall balsam fir (Abies balsamea) is known as the Wedding Area (19). A few weddings per year take place in this space.

Northeast of the Wedding Area lies the bulk of the Rhododendron Collection (16). A rhododendron allée leads up a slope to a striking pitch pine (Pinus rigida). The lilac collection occupies the top of the slope behind this pine. Eastward at the top of the hill is the stone bench memorializing Professor Margaret C. Ferguson (17) for whom Wellesley’s greenhouses are named. Miss Ferguson particularly enjoyed the vista from this point in the arboretum.

Cedar Knoll (14), just north of the rhododendrons and lilacs, is home to a grove of Sawara cypress (Chamaecyparis pisifera). The paved path north of the knoll is the demarcation between the H. H. Hunnewell Arboretum to the south side, and the Alexandra Botanic Garden to the north side. The Alexandra Botanic Garden contains many specimens planted in family collections. A small Waterfall (13) runs down the north side of Cedar Knoll and crosses under the paved path. This waterfall marks the beginning of the Silver Thread, the miniature stream that winds through the Alexandra Botanic Garden to Paramecium Pond.

Walk westward on the paved path. On either side are members of the Rosaceae or Rose Family (10): crabapples (Malus spp.) and cherries (Prunus serrulata). On the right just past the large cherry is the “Wild Spot” (9), a sculpture by artist Nancy Holt. Step off the path and walk towards the sculpture. Follow the path of the Silver Thread, keeping it on your right, past the holly (Ilex spp.) collection and the Japanese weeping cherry (Prunus yedoensis ‘Shindare yoshino’) beside Mirror Pond (8).

Continue to follow the Silver Thread westward. Notable trees in this area include a tulip tree (Liriodendron tulipifera), dawn redwood (Metasequoia glyptostroboides) and some 300-year-old white oaks (Quercus alba).

The small platform bridge near the oaks provides convenient access to the other side of the Silver Thread. The north side of Paramecium Pond holds the Nut Tree Collection (4) and some deciduous conifers that live in the Wet Meadow (1).

Paramecium Pond (2) is a much-loved spot on campus. The birches (Betula spp.), azaleas (Rhododendron spp.), and highbush blueberries (Vaccinium corymbosum) are all well-adapted to this water’s edge habitat. If you like, please add your impressions of the Botanic Gardens to the visitor book in the wooden box near the bench.

Alongside the paved path just east of Paramecium Pond is the Bog Garden (3), planted with native pitcher plants (Sarracenia spp.), sundews (Drosera spp.) and other bog-adapted native species. Across the path is the Maple Swamp (26). On the south side of the swamp, atop the water treatment building, is a Green Roof (27) planted as a trial garden for native species to test their tolerances for the rooftop habitat.

Walk eastward along the paved path to the base of Observatory Hill. The slope below Whitin Observatory is the site of the Edible Ecosystem Teaching Garden (25), designed to mimic the structure and processes of a natural plant community while supporting fruit trees and other edibles. Plantings are carefully designed to emulate the mutually supportive relationships found in healthy forest ecosystems.

Climb Observatory Hill toward the Science Center, then follow the path eastward to return to the Visitor Center (31). We hope that you have enjoyed walking through this living laboratory here at Wellesley College.