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 (28). The numbers refer to locations on the map.

Across from the Visitor Center and above the stone wall is the Creighton Educational Garden (24), 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.

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 (23) 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 (21). 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 Arboretum Dell (20).

Northeast of the Arboretum Dell lies the bulk of the Rhododendron Collection (19). A rhododendron allée leads up 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 (18) for whom Wellesley’s greenhouses are named. Miss Ferguson particularly enjoyed the vista from this point in the arboretum.

Cedar Knoll (17), 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 Alexandria Botanic Garden to the north side. The Alexandria Botanic Garden contains many specimens planted in family collections. A small Waterfall (16) 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 Alexandria Botanic Garden to Paramecium Pond.

Walk westward on the paved path. On either side are members of the Rosaceae or Rose Family (13): crabapples (Malus spp.) and cherries (Prunus serrulata). On the right just past the large cherry is the “Wild Spot” (11), 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 (10).

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).

Alongside the Silver Thread just where it empties into Paramecium Pond is Molly’s Garden (5). Planted in memory of former Dean of Students Molly Campbell ’60, this garden of flowering perennials is in bloom from early spring through late autumn. Nearby, on the other side of the Silver thread, you can enjoy a contemplative walk through the Labyrinth (4).

Just beyond the Labyrinth is the Nut Tree Collection (3), including towering black walnuts (Juglans nigra) and shellbark hickories (Carya laciniosa), with hazelnuts (Corylus americana) in the understory.

Paramecium Pond (1) 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. The pond is being studied by faculty and student researchers, and the red ball on the surface of the pond is a buoy holding temperature sensors. 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 (6), 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 (28). We hope that you have enjoyed walking through this living laboratory here at Wellesley College.