



KIRSTENBOSCH

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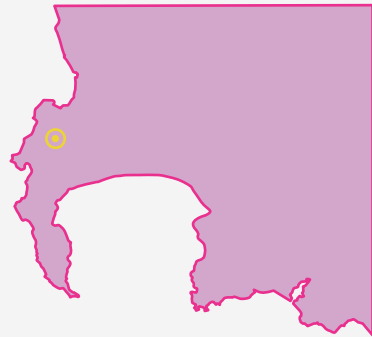
“This is the place!”

Those were the very words of Professor Harold Pearson, on 10 February 1911, as he stood looking up towards the rolling foothills of Table Mountain, from a spot which is today a gate just inside the main entrance to Kirstenbosch.

Pearson, who became the first director of Kirstenbosch, had a dream of a botanical garden at the southern tip of Africa. Back then, the land that lay before him was a neglected farm with a rundown homestead and a few dilapidated cottages, overrun with weeds, alien trees and scores of feral pigs.

Pearson, however, was a man of vision. He saw before him a vast and versatile tract of land capable of sustaining many diverse types of flora and fauna. And whos to say he did not visualise it the way it is today? With landscaped lawns and shady trees perfect for picnickers, a natural spring that gives rise to a bubbling brook and duck ponds complete with ducks; birds and bees and blossoming trees that were born a hundred years ago, plus a wooden walkway at canopy level to admire them from; a host of fragrant flowers for Africa and of Africa, and aromatic fynbos in a cacophony of colour for every season. Plus, a natural amphitheatre filled with living fossils that we call cycads, started by Pearson himself, who donated his own personal collection of cycads to realise his dream of a botanical garden.

And when you stand at that same spot where Prof. Pearson stood more than a hundred years ago, and you raise your gaze up high to the distant silhouette of Castle Rock, you will know, just as he knew; this was definitely the right place. Kirstenbosch, today, is a blooming paradise.



A botanical paradise

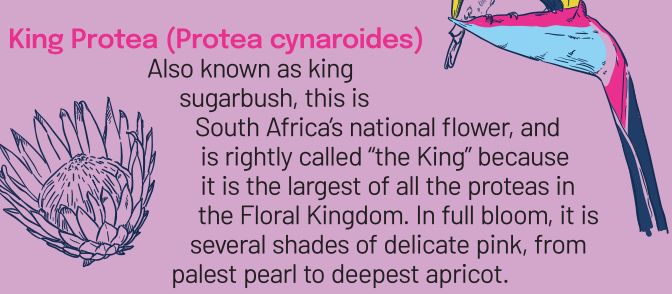
Kirstenbosch is recognised as one of the seven most magnificent botanical gardens in the world, as well as one of the biggest. The entire Kirstenbosch estate is about 530 hectares, of which 36 hectares are cultivated. The rest of the land is a protected reserve which hosts natural forests and fynbos, as well as indigenous wildlife including birds, insects and bats, all crucial for pollination. The 36-hectare cultivated garden hosts 7000 plant species and more than 450 tree species. Furthermore, Kirstenbosch falls within the greater Cape Floral Kingdom which was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2004, largely because of its extreme diversity of plant life.

Five floral icons

Among the many thousands of species on display, there are five that stand out as revered historical and cultural icons.

Strelitzia (Strelitzia reginae)

Also known as Mandela's Gold and Yellow Bird of Paradise. In full bloom, the brilliant yellow and vivid purple flowers contrast beautifully with the broad grey-green leaves. Each flower lasts about a week, but each spathe holds 5 to 7 flowers, so the full floral display lasts quite a while longer.



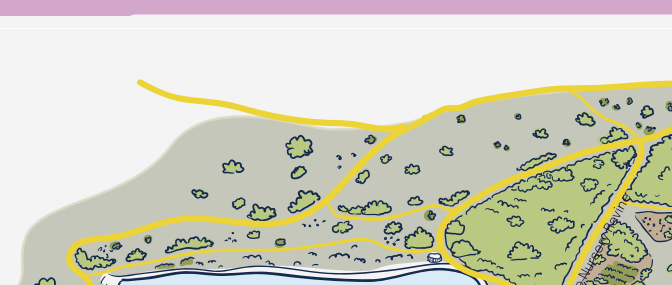
King Protea (Protea cynaroides)

Also known as king sugarbush, this is South Africa's national flower, and is rightly called "the King" because it is the largest of all the proteas in the Floral Kingdom. In full bloom, it is several shades of delicate pink, from palest pearl to deepest apricot.



Lion's Ear (Leonotis leonurus)

Also known as Wild Dagga in South Africa, is a striking shrub that blooms from summer into autumn, with its vivid orange flowers peaking in late summer. The tubular blooms grow in whorls along tall stems, attracting bees, butterflies, and sunbirds. Drought-tolerant and fast-growing, it's valued for both its ornamental beauty and ecological benefits.



Arum Lilies

Native to southern Africa, these flowers are elegant with striking white, funnel-shaped flowers and lush green leaves. Often found near wetlands and streams, they bloom from late winter to spring. Symbolizing purity and beauty, arum lilies are popular in gardens and floral arrangements, thriving in moist soil and partial shade. They are also a protected species in the wild.



Vygies (Aizoaceae)

Part of the Aizoaceae family, they are iconic South African succulents known for their dazzling, jewel-toned blooms. Thriving in dry, sunny conditions, these low-growing plants carpet the ground in vibrant pinks, purples, oranges, and yellows. Blooming mainly in spring, vygies are beloved for their resilience, vivid color, and ability to transform arid landscapes.

Creatures great and small

Otters: Just beyond the Main Lawn, lies the Otter Pond, with a sculpture of an otter in the centre. The otters who frequent the pool are quite shy and seldom seen, but they regularly leave their scat and footprints.



Otter Pond (at number 59 on the map).

Egyptian Geese

They tend to graze in couples because they're monogamous, and they're fond of the Main Lawn. They're not true geese because they're members of the shelduck sub-family, and they're not really Egyptian because they're found in many places south of the Sahara.



Table Mountain Butterfly

The large wings have rich brown, yellow and cream markings, with circular patterns along the outer edges. They are active pollinators, mostly attracted to red flowers.

Caracal

This is a medium-sized wild cat, sleek but robust in build, with large tufted and pointed ears, and a sandy coat. They are carnivores that prey on birds, rodents and other small mammals. They can leap up to 3m high and catch birds in mid-air. Since they're nocturnal, you might see one at dusk or early morning, if you're lucky.



Angulate Tortoise

This species has geometric leopard-like markings on its shell, and is known as the rooipens skilpad (redbelly tortoise) in Afrikaans because of its reddish underbelly. They have five claws on their front legs, four on the back legs.

Grysbok

A small antelope with large ears and cute little horns, endemic to the Western Cape. The name means "grey buck" but their coat is actually reddish in colour, sort-of auburn.

Snakes

Yes, there are occasional snakes, but they are almost never seen because they lie furtively hidden in the mulched beds, waiting to capture prey. And their only interest is their next meal: small birds and rodents and such. Visitors must stick to the pathways and stay out of the beds.

Dinosaurs

Kirstenbosch has six life-size tin sculptures of dinosaurs dotted around the cycad garden, sculptures which help visitors realise that these plants have been around since the Age of Dinosaurs. The largest and most impressive of these sculptures is the one near Wood's Cycad, the Nqweba Dinosaur.

A leisurely stroll through the Garden

1. Botanical Society Conservatory
2. Camphor Avenue
3. The Dell
4. Colonel Bird's Bath
5. The Cycad Amphitheatre
6. Pearson's Grave
7. The Mathews Rockery
8. Arboretum and Tree Canopy Walkway
9. Van Riebeeck's Hedge
10. The Fynbos Garden
11. The Protea Garden
12. The Buchu Garden
13. The Erica Garden
14. The Restio Garden
15. The Koppie
16. The Useful Plants Garden
17. The Fragrance Garden
18. The Forest Braille Trail
19. The Garden of Extinction
20. The Peninsula Garden
21. The Waterwise Garden
22. The Garden of Weeds
23. The Sculpture Garden
24. The Vlei Garden
25. The Annuals
26. The Centre for Home Gardening
27. Summer Sunset Concerts

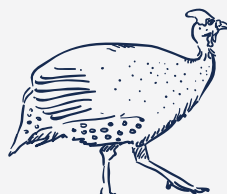
Restaurants

28. Moyo Restaurant
29. Fynkos, the Kirstenbosch Tea Room
30. Vida e Caffè

Shopping

31. Happy by Nature
32. The Kirstenbosch Gift Shop
33. Botanical Society Bookshop

34. Manor House
35. Seed Orchard
36. Viewing Deck
37. Rycroft Gate: Gate 3
38. Garden Office
39. Stores
40. Old Rhodes Drive



41. Conference Centre
42. Service Entrance (No Entry)
43. Main Entrance
44. Gazebo
45. Gate House
46. SANBI Cape Office
47. Window Stream

48. Bell Tower and Gates
49. Botanical Society Office
50. Lecture Hall
51. Education Centre
52. Skeleton Stream
53. Stone Pines
54. Old Dam
55. Nursery Stream
56. Sun Shelters
57. The BIG Fig
58. The Boomslang (Canopy Walkway)
59. The Otter Pond
60. The Main Pond

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A stroll through paradise

1-Botanical Society Conservatory

This conservatory is known as the Desert House, because it houses many succulents and other species found in arid or semi-arid regions of southern Africa. The conservatory has a glass roof that shelters the plants from too much water in the winter, but is open on three sides to allow for ample air circulation. This Conservatory is vast; it consists of the main house and four corner houses. Taking centre-stage is an impressive baobab tree, the world's largest succulent.



2-Camphor Avenue

Today, Camphor Avenue is a densely-treed walkway with overarching branches that provide serene and dappled shade to walk in. Most of these trees were planted by Cecil John Rhodes (or his gardeners) during the time when he owned the farm, from 1895 to 1902. He imported camphor trees by the score, Moreton Bay figs, and cork oaks from various parts of the Empire. His intension was to create an avenue of such beauty that it would be suitable for the Queen of England's carriage to travel along when she came to visit the Colony. The visit from Queen Victoria never occurred but the trees are still there.

3-The Dell

The area known as The Dell is the oldest part of the Garden. It was here that Pearson and Mathews, the Garden's first curator, started digging to eradicate aliens in 1913. Umpteen hand axes and other stone tools were unearthed, tools that point to the ancient presence of Stone Age man, prehistoric inhabitants of the area. From the start, Pearson and Mathews both agreed that only local stone would be used in the garden, so stonemasons were, and still are, just as important as gardeners. The original stonework that was laid down throughout the 1920s is still good today.

4-Colonel Bird's Bath

This bird-shaped bath at the heart of the Garden is the focal point of the Dell. It was built in about 1811 by Colonel Bird, who owned the farm which occupied that land before it became a garden. The shape of the bath seems to have been a deliberate play on his name. The Bath is fed by four crystal-clear springs, which explains why the colonel built it in the first place; it was to collect fresh spring water.

There is a persistent local legend that claims this was Lady Anne Barnard's bath, but that cannot possibly be true, because Lady Anne left the Cape in 1802, years before this bath was even built.



5-The Cycad Amphitheatre

Just above the Bath, you'll find a natural amphitheatre filled with cycads too numerous to count. This collection of southern African cycads was first started by Pearson himself. They are "living fossils" – a fitting label, because fossils from the Jurassic Era prove that cycads have barely changed at all since then.

Wood's Cycad (*Encephalartos woodii*) is extinct in the wild, so the specimen in Kirstenbosch is described as "the last of its kind." Its lower trunk and root area are enclosed in a locked cage to protect it from would-be thieves.



6-Pearson's Grave

When Professor Harold Pearson died on 3 November 1916, aged just 46, the best years of his life had been dedicated to realising his dream of a botanical garden for the indigenous plants of Southern Africa. To honour his contribution, he was laid to rest in the garden he helped create, not far from his beloved cycads. The epitaph on his gravestone is as apposite here as it was on Sir Christopher Wren's. "If ye seek his Monument, look around."

7-The Mathews Rockery

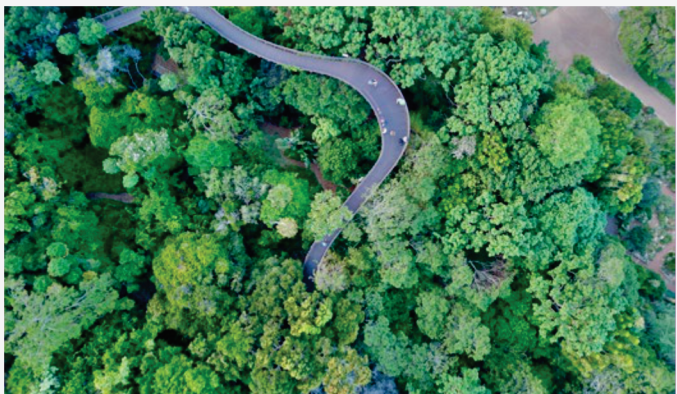
The Mathews Rockery truly is a garden that rocks! It's like a little labyrinth of interleading stone pathways and steps that provide the setting for hundreds of weird and wonderful xerophytic plants, adapted to very dry conditions and lots of sun. Here, you will see many different species of aloe, for instance, which flower in winter so they're at their colourful best from late May to July.

Joseph William Mathews was the first curator of Kirstenbosch, from 1913 till 1936, and he was personally responsible for devising and overseeing the elaborate stonework. The entire rockery is constructed entirely with local sandstone and took most of the 1920s to complete.

8-The Arboretum and Tree Canopy Walkway

The Arboretum boasts more than 450 different species of trees, all from southern Africa, with a vast array of shade-loving perennials, shrubs and bulbs growing in the middle- and understorey. So luxuriant is the growth here that parts of it look more like a little forest than an arboretum.

The wooden walkway at canopy level was built in 2013 to mark the centenary year of the Garden. It is a remarkable piece of carpentry, an aerial bridge-like walkway that winds its way through the arboretum canopy for 130 metres without once disturbing the top of a single tree. The two ends of the wooden walkway are cleverly interlaced with the natural undergrowth so as to be almost invisible, and the side-walls are made of convexly-curved logs, equally spaced, to mimic the ribcage of a snake. In fact, the walkway is known to locals as The Boomslang because it mimics a tree snake winding its way through the topmost branches.



9-Van Riebeeck's Hedge

Back in the 1680s, while Jan van Riebeeck was Governor of the Kaap de Goede Hoop, the settlement he founded encroached upon the traditional spring grazing lands of the local Khoena People, who took a very dim view, and regularly breached the boundaries of the Dutch settlement to graze their cattle. So van Riebeeck decided to build a barrier hedge, with wild almond trees and thorny brambles.

The wild almond (*Brabejum stellatifolium*) is not an almond, but it certainly grows wild. It is a member of the Protea Family. It is often multi-stemmed and has many thick spreading branches that intertwine at ground level. Interspersed with thorny brambles, it would make a very effective barrier for cattle.

10-The Fynbos Garden

Fynbos is a very distinctive type of vegetation found only on the southern tip of Africa and includes a very wide range of species. At some point along the walk, you will get your first whiff of that very distinctive aroma that is fynbos. And once you become familiar with it, you will recognise it anywhere.

11-The Protea Garden

The Protea Garden is at its blooming and colourful best during winter and spring, from late May to October. Most proteas are bird-pollinated. In full bloom, they are the favourite food of sugarbirds and sunbirds.



12-The Buchu Garden

Buchu (*Agathosma*) belongs to the citrus family, but it has a very strong scent all its own. The pale pink petals and stamens are much loved by bees. Buchu is used medicinally as a diuretic, so it is found in over-the-counter herbal preparations such as buchu tea and buchu oil. Used topically, the sap is a mild antiseptic.

13-The Erica Garden

Ericas are commonly known as heaths or heathers, and since they occur in Europe as well, many visitors will recognise them. However, where Europe has 21 species of Erica, southern Africa has about 770. Peak flowering season for most Erica is during spring and summer, from September to February. Of the species on display here, some have tubular flowers which seem to attract sunbirds, and some attract mostly bees.

14-The Restio Garden

Restios are also known as Cape reeds, but this is something of a misnomer; they are reed-like, yes, but not reeds. The most well-known of the restios is the Albertinia Thatching Restio (*Thamnochortus insignis*), recognisable because it is tall, elegant and striking. It is probably the most commercially farmed species of fynbos since it is used extensively in the thatching industry.

15-The Koppie

This well-drained rocky outcrop draws crowds from a distance. It has a colourful display of bright flowers with fragrant foliage that most of us know as geraniums, but the more correct name is pelargoniums. They are at their colourful best from late spring to early summer. The Koppie also displays other drought-tolerant plants such as fynbos and assorted bulbs.

16-Useful Plants Garden

This garden is dedicated to plants that have medicinal and traditional or cultural uses, and there are storyboards explaining these uses. The sour fig plant has edible fruits and is used to make sour fig konfyt, a syrupy sweet-and-sour confiture of the Cape-Malay culture; it is also used medicinally to ease sore throats, treat mouth ulcers, burns, bruises and cuts.



Useful Information & Entry Times

Ticket offices are located at Gates 1, 2 and 3.

The main ticket office is at Gate 1. Tel: 021 799 8782

The information desk is at Gate 1. Tel: 021 799 8783

Kirstenbosch Garden is open year-round, every day. In winter (April to August), the operating hours are from 8am to 6pm, and in summer (September to March), the hours are 8am to 7pm. The Conservatory is open daily from 9am to 5pm.



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17-The Fragrance Garden

The Fragrance Garden has raised beds, each dedicated to a particular type of flora specifically chosen for its fragrant properties. Here, and only here, visitors are encouraged to use more than their noses; they're allowed to rub the leaves between their fingers, even pick tiny sprigs and crush them to release the full fragrance.

18-The Forest Braille Trail

The Braille Trail is a short, self-guided trail that allows the visually impaired to explore a natural forest unassisted. A guide rope along the trail guides visitors, and there are strategically placed blocks along the rope to mark stopping places. Storyboards, in large print and Braille, describe the forest, plants and animals in the immediate habitat, and boardwalks take visitors safely over a small wetland habitat. The storyboards also explain how to find the benches and water fountain.

19-Garden of Extinction

This garden is sad, but inspirational too; sad, because it is a "graveyard" for indigenous species that have passed into extinction; inspirational, because it showcases several indigenous species that may soon be extinct in the wild, but for which there is still hope if we look after them.



23-The Sculpture Garden

This garden is quite literally a work of art. It's an outdoor exhibition of Mambo stone sculptures, displayed on a rotational basis. The sculptures follow the Shona tradition coming out of Zimbabwe, and the work feels culturally authentic.

24-The Vlei Garden

A wet and boggy garden, with a wooden boardwalk, so you can view the abundant plant and animal life without getting your feet wet. Listen out for frogs; they're a sure sign that all is well in this watery habitat.

25-The Annuals

An annual is a plant that completes its life cycle, from germination to the production of seeds, within one growing season, and then dies. Depending on the season, you could see a riot of several colours – flame lilies, African lilies, gazania, lobelia or mountain aloe.

26-The Centre for Home Gardening

Houses the Happy by Nature retail nursery, the garden shop, and a small gift store. At Gate 2.

27-Summer Sunset Concerts

Kirstenbosch boasts a Concert Lawn, complete with stage, where they host Summer Sunset Concerts on Sundays, from late November till April. These picnic-style concerts invite you to relax on a blanket with your basket and some good grub, and just groove. International superstars who have performed here in the past include Miriam Makeba, Johnny Clegg, Cliff Richard, Elton John, Art Garfunkel, Joe Cocker and Brian Adams. Local musicians include Lira, Freshlyground and The Parlotones.

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