

## What is a botanic garden?

A.M. Proctor<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Andrea proctor landscapes, Victoria, Australia

<sup>2</sup>University of Melbourne, Burnley, Victoria, Australia

Corresponding author email: [andrea@andreaproctor.com.au](mailto:andrea@andreaproctor.com.au)

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For those of us who work in botanic gardens it may seem like an obvious question: what is a botanic garden? But for the public, managers, and even some staff, the question does not always have a straightforward answer. Many definitions have been proposed, often focusing on conservation work and more reflective of gardens of the calibre of Kew, Singapore and Missouri than the realities of small or establishing botanic gardens. Even the Oxford dictionary definition, while helpful, misses the intricacies of what a botanic garden is, and the work they do. This came to the fore in the development of the Living Collections Toolkit for Botanic Gardens Australia and New Zealand in 2023, a web-based tool that allows gardens of any size to develop a best-practice Living Collections Plan. But to do this, it needed to manage the capacity of gardens from the well-resourced with hundreds of staff through to small volunteer run institutions. This talk presents a new approach to categorising botanic gardens based on their capacity and resources, and provides a framework for them to develop and achieve their full potential while working within their capabilities. It also provides a progression structure for any botanic institution that is ready to expand their work but are not ready for accreditation. Working with the 1988 IUCN definition, the approach has been workshopped with botanic gardens across Australia and New Zealand and is being presented for wider discussion. The aim is to lend legitimacy to all botanic gardens, but particularly small ones, especially in the eyes of the public and funding bodies, and to empower them to reach their full potential. It also encourages collaboration and support within the botanic garden network. For after all, we may not all be Singapore, Kew, Melbourne, or Missouri, but we are all botanic gardens.