

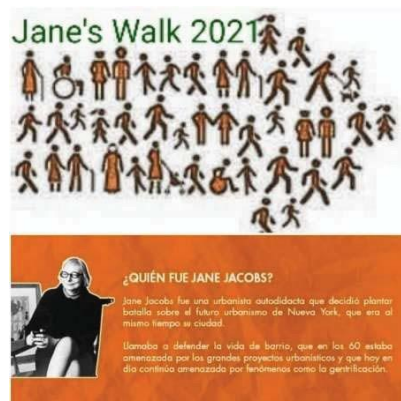
# A WALK THROUGH THE PARK OF MÁLAGA

Anabel López Sesé

## Parks as enjoyment places in the city



Green areas in cities make them more livable for its neighbors and visitors. They provide a bit of the natural environment to a dynamic city with an environment frequently aggressive and stressful.



Parks and gardens, although generally quite different from a natural habitat, are places for leisure and relax in the midst of the noisy urban environment. Its enjoyment provides **calmness**, so important for the physical, mental, emotional health of everybody, especially for sick people. It can also potentially be a suitable meeting place for people integration.

If parks also have tall and exuberant vegetation, they provided a quiet and peaceful site, isolated from nearby noise and surrounding traffic. It also creates a microclimate that softens and moderates the temperature in cities.

## The park of Malaga, from its beginning



Our city Malaga has an acceptable number of garden areas, both public and private. The best known of them is the one generically called El Parque de Málaga, The Park of Malaga. A large central garden, well connected by bus.





From a bird's eye view, it is a green and parallel to the port coastline axis, located between the downtown, and Gibralfaro, crowned with the Alcazaba and other gardens (Puerta Oscura and Pedro Luis Alonso gardens). It is also accompanied by the tree lined avenue called 'Paseo de los Curas'.





The park, which is located on a land formerly reclaimed from the sea, has been part of our city since the end of the 19th century, when it was conceived as a space for enjoyment. So this space has been in our city for more than a hundred years.



With about 800 meters in length and a surface of a little more than three hectares, it is an open space, without any gate, distributed on both sides of the main avenue. However, its southern part is the largest and the one known properly as the Park. This wide area has two long paved walks, and a central green area part with paths to wander and gaze the exotic vegetation and small monuments.



Several park restylings have been carried out, being in 2006-2007 one of the most important ones. Among many others, throughout its history there have been changes in the pavement and the elimination of a floral clock at its entrance near the Plaza de la Marina. Also several ponds with swans and ducks were removed since then. However, some other aquatic structures can be observed.



Old park photos (1970s)



Current park images (April 2021)





The playground area has also **changed**, and only the well-known Little donkey Platero has remained there, observing how generations of people from Malaga, born or adopted, and numerous visitors and tourists walk by.



Despite these renovations, loss of elements such as old libraries, and the location change of statues and fountains, the park remains, in essence, quite similar to its beginnings. Many historical elements still persist such as small fountains and circus with part of the original decorated tiles.







The park is also a witness of cultural and festive events from its inception (being Malaga fair held on several occasions), to more recent events such as the Book Fair, art and food local product exhibition, as well as the location of stands for Christmas items and solidarity events, among others.

The location of the Eduardo Ocón musical venue in the park, not without controversy in its beginnings due to the elimination of the park's green area, has allowed the celebration of music and dance festivals, and open-air cinema during years, also housing urban art simples.



### Extraordinary botanical diversity

The greatest value of this important space in our city is its flora, one of the richest and most biodiverse public parks in Spain.

This park presents more than 360 plant species, mostly from tropical and subtropical climates around the world, and which thrive **adequately** in our coastal Mediterranean climate, with mild winters and warm summers.



Previous park renovations have also led to the replacement of diseased plants by healthy individuals or by plants of another type. In some cases, the number of species has increased significantly. This is the case of the palm tree collection coming from remote and exotic places, one of the best in a public space with free access. It is noteworthy that some of these species are considered vulnerable or in danger of disappearing in their places of origin. This fact gives greater importance, if possible, to green spaces like this, since they are one of the few places where these species can already be found and, if necessary, reproduced for their conservation.

Some of the trees in the park of Malaga have remarkable dimensions, such as oaks, podocarps and ceibas, some of them even remain since the beginning around 1900. A walk through this park allows us to discover authentic botanical jewels.

A diagram, located at its entrance through the Plaza de La Marina, shows us the rail network as well as a selection of plant species. Along the way we will find small signs with some information about some of these plants, although some of them need improvement.

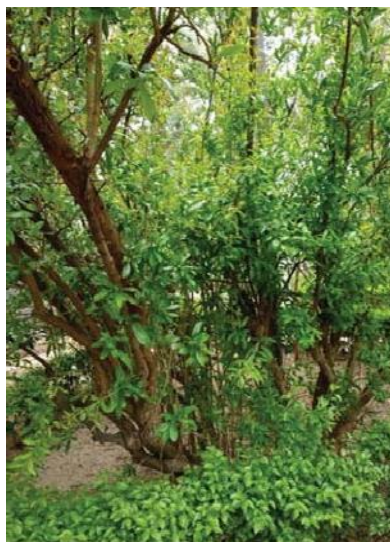


## Especies seleccionadas de El Parque de Málaga



We can wander contemplatively through a small trail network of paths, where we can enjoy seeing exuberant trees and, depending on the season, colorful flowers.

Also we can take botanical tours through space, crossing the five continents, and through time since this park treasures very ancient species such as gymnosperms or non-flowering plants (pines, araucarias and cycas), and among angiosperms (with flowers), from botanical antiques like magnolias, with large solitary flowers, to evolved ones with specialized flowers and sophisticated pollination systems.



We can also take a more specific botanical tour to get to know some closest species from Europe, such as holm oaks, oaks, palms and hackberries, or the exuberant collection of palm trees from all over the world. We can also look for species with culinary use or related to them, or simply take a trip to color, looking for flowers. Given the high number of species, it is impossible to get to know them all, so, in each short walk we take through the park of Malaga, like the one we propose here, we will be able to see a brushstroke of this mosaic of plant biodiversity.



## Our closest plants

The park of Malaga not only has an excellent representation of exotic flora, but it also shows us wonderful specimens from our terroir.

The holm oak is one of the most abundant and representative tree species of the Iberian Peninsula, although the species varies according to the region. The one in the park, *Quercus ilex* subspecies *ballota*, has larger and longer leaves than the *rotundifolia* species (round leaf) from Malaga mountains. Its wood has been used for centuries to build boats and carts, its firewood to make charcoal, tannins from its bark for tanning, and its acorns to feed livestock. We can also see a related species such as the *Quercus robur* oak, with lobulated leaves quite similar to the gall oak from our mountains.



*Quercus ilex* subspecies *ballota*



*Quercus robur*



Drago or Guanches tree, *Dracaena drago*, of remarkable appearance and longevity, was considered a magical tree. Its name is due to the medicinal properties attributed to its sap, called 'dragon's blood' since it acquires a red color in contact with air, and it has also been used for stains and varnishes. It is a slow-growing tree (one meter every ten years), with dichotomous or trichhotomous branching. It is the plant symbol of Tenerife where thrive in the wild (Macaronesian region).





In the park we can see an endemic Canarian conifer characteristic of its volcanic soils, the Canarian pine, *Pinus canariensis*. Even more than 40m high, its leaves (needles) are grouped three by three. It has an excellent adaptation to fire since fires cause the sudden opening of its cones, favoring the seed dispersal. This function is linked to the regenerative capacity of Canarian pine adult trees after a fire.



*Phoenix canariensis* palm is a Canarian endemism that has spread throughout the world, given its ornamental value and that supports cold temperatures, even frosts down to  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ . It can reach more than 30 meters high.

The Palmito, *Chamaerops humilis*, is the only palm species that grows naturally in the Iberian Peninsula. Its sprouts have been used as food and its leaves to make utensils such as baskets or hats.



*Phoenix canariensis*



*Chamaerops humilis*



## Exuberant and ancient plants from the five continents

Let's now travel around the world through some of its best represented species in the park of Malaga. Many of them are also authentic living fossils.

In the park we can find several species of *Araucaria*. These trees are very old evolutionarily speaking, with Jurassic fossil finds. They come from Australia and the American South Cone, and many of them have adapted adequately to our climate.

The *Araucaria bidwillii*, called Bunya-bunya or bunya pine, has curious very leathery and spiky leaves, reason which some people call them dragon's tail.



*Araucaria bidwillii*



*Araucaria heterophylla*

*Araucaria heterophylla* is more common in our gardens and streets, being known as floor pine. Its thick and huge trunks have been used as ship masts since late 18th century, after their discovery.



Also considered very primitive plants, the Cycas, although they look like palm trees, they are not related to them. The *Cycas revoluta* species, coming from China and Japan, is easily recognizable since it is very common in gardens. As many other ornamental species, all its parts are poisonous. Another species of great beauty that in our park is *Cycas circinalis* coming from India.



*Cycas revoluta*



*Cycas circinalis*

The *Ginkgo biloba* tree is another living fossil, existing for more than 250 million years and currently with no living relative species. It comes from China where it is considered as a sacred tree. It shows fan-shaped leaves of a vibrant green color that turn golden yellow during the fall in colder places. It is known as the walnut of Japan, and it is a dioecious species: there are female trees and male trees.





Near Modesto Laza fountain, there is a magnificent specimen of Mexican cypress or ahuehuate (*Taxodium huegelii*), a very long-lived species that lives on the banks of rivers and streams, and can reach 40m in height. In Mexico some of these trees are considered monuments such as 'the Tree of the Sad Night', related to a legend about the victory of the Aztecs over Cortés.



### The palm tree collection

Palm trees (Arecaceae family) are widely distributed in tropical and warm temperate regions. Although they are woody plants, sometimes arborescent, they do not show secondary trunk growth, so they can be considered as herbs (like other monocots), although of huge size. They are easily recognizable and usually have fleshy fruits (berries or drupes).

This botanical family is one with the greatest representation in this park, with more than 80 species. About 20 of them are classified as vulnerable or threatened with extinction due to habitat destruction and illegal seed collection. Its maintenance in optimal conditions is very important. In addition to the palmito and the Canarian palm tree from Europe, we will find species from all over the world.

From East Africa (Madagascar)



*Bismarckia nobilis*



*Ravenia vulgaris*



From Central and South America



*Chamaedorea elegans*



*Butia paraguayensis*



*Roystonea borinquena*



*Parajubaea torallyi*



*Brahea armata*

From Asia and Oceania



*Arenga engleri*



*Rhopalostylis sapida*



*Pritchardia hillebrandii*



## Fruit species from afar and close relatives

In addition to the garden orange trees (*Citrus aurantium*), in the park of Malaga we also find species whose fruits we know in our homes for a few decades. With small flowers in many cases, they provide us with tasty fruits or seeds. In the park, besides the avocado tree (*Persea americana*) from America, we can see *Macadamia integrifolia* coming from Oceania and Indonesia, whose seed is the macadamia nut.



*Macadamia integrifolia*



*Murraya paniculata*

Related to citrus (Rutaceae family) and Asian origin, we find a bush with white flowers and jasmine scent, now showing its fruits. It is the *Murraya paniculata*, with medicinal leaves, barks and fruits.

The breadfruit, *Pandanus utilis*, comes from Madagascar (East Africa) and has a pineapple-shaped fruit that is edible, although not very tasty.





## Colors in the park

Besides the exuberant foliage, walkers can enjoy colors. Spring is a good season.



Among trees and shrubs with beautiful flowers, we can find a couple of Bignoniaceous species: the Gabon Tulip (*Spathodea campanulata*) from tropical Africa, and the Yellow Bignonia (*Tecoma stans*) of Central American origin (Mexico and Florida). The first one is considered an invasive plant in many places. The Yellow bignonia has medicinal uses for diabetes and digestive diseases.



*Spathodea campanulata*



*Tecoma stans*

Other flowering plants from very different origins can be found near the playground area. One of them has flowers whose colors vary from dark purple, through pale lilac, to White, depending on flower maturation, reason why is called as "yesterday, today, and tomorrow flower" as well as Jasmine or Azucena from Paraguay. It is the *Brunfelsia pauciflora* native to South America. Nearby



we find the Dombeya (*Dombeya x cayeuxii*) or Hydrangea Tree, coming from some African regions and Madagascar. Its inflorescences (flower groups) resemble the well-known hydrangeas.



*Brunfelsia pauciflora*



*Dombeya x cayeuxii*

Both, the *Clivia miniata* with its attractive reddish-orange bloom, and the Paradise bird, *Strelitzia reginae*, are native from South Africa, being very well known in gardens of our city.



*Clivia miniata*



*Strelitzia reginae*

Once this walk is finished, many other interesting and surprising plant species living in the park of Malaga remain to be discovered: podocarps, coral tree, bamboos, countless palms and palms, lilies, hackberries, kapok trees, as well as trees from beyond the seas, and however, very common now in the gardens, such as the South-American jacarandas with lilac flowers, the Grevillea or Australian fire tree, the pythosporus, and the Jupiter tree. This little walking can serve, however, to open the desire of knowing more details and enjoying plant biodiversity in the Park of Malaga.



## **Graphic and bibliographic documentation**

The text has been prepared by Anabel López-Sesé, as well as most of the current photos of the park. I want to thank Francisca Sánchez for the contribution of some photographs.

The old photographs come from various private sources and from the UMA photographic archive published on the 'Málaga Yesterday and Today' Facebook page.

The graphics and diagrams used come, among others, from various publications, such as the following:

Garretas, B. D., & Marfil, A. A. (2020). The collection of palm trees in Malaga Park. Bulletin of the Malagueña Academy of Sciences, (22), 63-67.

[https://parquesyjardines.malaga.eu/opencms/export/sites/parques/.content/galerias-html/especies/El-Parque-de-Malaga-y-su-entorno-monumental.-pdf\\_.pdf](https://parquesyjardines.malaga.eu/opencms/export/sites/parques/.content/galerias-html/especies/El-Parque-de-Malaga-y-su-entorno-monumental.-pdf_.pdf)

<https://jardinessinfronteras.com/2018/12/20/el-parque-de-malaga-un-paraiso-en-la-ciudad/>

## **For more information**

The book "El Parque de Málaga. Un ejemplo de biodiversidad", by Blanca Díez Garretas and Alfredo Asensi Marfil, editorial ISIRTU (2014), presents each plant species accompanied by a description, with detailed photos of leaves, trees and flowers, information on its distribution and a map of the park, as well as a glossary and a bibliography section.