

Rachel Carson Nature Center Guided Trail



*“Those who contemplate the beauty of
the earth find reserves of strength that
will endure as long as life lasts.”*

-Rachel Carson



10. Forest Vista Point

The forest you are standing in is a deciduous forest. Deciduous means "falling off or out at a certain season," which is what the leaves on the trees do when the winter comes.

The deciduous forest does not have many small plants, but there are a lot of trees. The trees have thick bark barriers to protect them from harsh weather and animals.

There are many animals in the forest. A lot of the animals eat nuts and acorns, which they get from the trees. A few common animals found in the deciduous forest are deer, squirrels, mice, raccoons, snakes, songbirds, frogs and many types of insects.

Take a moment to see if you can find any signs of animal life before you leave the forest!



1. Prairie Vista Point

Welcome to the Rachel Carson Nature Center! Take a look at the prairie ahead of you. It is important because...

1. It provides nutrients to the soil. Some prairie plants die each year and their roots decompose, which makes the soil very fertile. Fertile soil allows for many different plants to grow, including crops that we harvest and eat.
2. It provides a habitat for certain animals. Many insects, butterflies, songbirds, deer, rabbits, and other species rely on prairies for food and shelter.
3. It is beautiful. Nobody wants to live in a world of all concrete and buildings. Prairies are important for us to explore in, so that we understand the natural beauty in life.

8. Bur Oak Tree

The Bur Oak Tree is native to the Midwestern U.S. and southern Canada. It is a large deciduous tree growing up to 100 feet tall. Its trunk can have a diameter of up to 10 feet, making it one of the largest oak trees. The bur oak commonly lives to be 200 to 300 years old. The tree's seeds are large acorns, which can be up to 2 inches long. It is a fire-resistant tree, which makes it suited for prairies, which are regularly burned.



Many animals use the bur oak for food; American black bears like the acorns, and deer and porcupine eat the leaves, twigs, and bark.

9. Boxelder Tree



Boxelder Trees are a type of Maple tree. They are native to the Midwestern United States. They usually grow in wet deciduous forests, but they are also a highly invasive species and will grow in most disturbed sites. These trees have a relatively short life compared to other types of trees, and their wood is very soft. They often have branches sprouting along the trunk, because the trees re-sprout in places where they have been damaged.

2. Purple Coneflowers



Purple coneflowers are native to the Midwestern and southeastern United States. They grow to be 2 to 3 feet tall. They are drought tolerant flowers and love the sun, which makes them perfectly suited for their prairie habitat. Their seeds are housed in the center of each flower. The centers are cone-shaped, which is how these flowers got their name. Bees and butterflies are attracted to coneflowers.

3. Side-oats Gramma Grass

Side-oats gramma grass is common along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. It grows almost exclusively in prairies. The grass grows from 2 to 2.5 feet tall. Side-oats gramma grass gets its name because the leaves of the grass grow on one side of the stem. It is light green during the spring and summer, but in fall it turns tan. It enjoys sun and dry soil. Grasshoppers and songbirds feed off the grass.



6. Goldenrod

Goldenrod is a prairie plant native to North America. It can grow up to 1.5 meters tall. The bright yellow flower heads bloom in late summer and produce heavy pollen. A casual observer may notice round, swollen lumps on goldenrod stems. These are called galls and they are the homes of two different types of insects that are parasites on the goldenrod. Inside the galls are moth or fly larvae. The moths or flies will emerge in late summer through a hole at one end of the gall.



7. Indian Grass



Indian grass is native to the U.S. and grows well in prairies. It grows to be 3 to 7 feet tall and has a distinct golden color. It has flowering tufts at the top of the plant, and leaves sprout from the bottom of the plant. It prefers sun and sandy soils. Grasshoppers eat Indian Grass, and it provides good cover for birds and other animals in the prairie.

4. Little Bluestem



Little Bluestem is a prairie grass particularly predominant in the Midwestern United States. The grass is 2 to 3 feet tall and tufted at the ends. Little Bluestem needs a lot of sunlight to grow, and it prefers dry soil. The grass is blue in the spring and summer, but it turns a brilliant red during the fall. Many types of caterpillars and grasshoppers eat the grass, and tree sparrows eat the seeds.

5. Common milkweed

Milkweed is native to most of North America east of the Rocky Mountains. It grows in sandy soils and appreciates lots of sunlight. It grows from 1 to 2 meters tall and has a very hairy stem. The plant produces a white, milky substance when broken. It holds its seeds in large seed pods. Several insects live off the plant, including the monarch butterfly and the milkweed beetle.

