

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE



PRAIRIE LIFE

NATURE TRAIL

Purtis Creek State Park

Prairie Life Nature Trail

- Easy to moderate hike
- 1¼ miles round-trip
- Foot traffic only
- Primitive camping sites A – M

Please be respectful of paying primitive camping guests and do not enter occupied campsites

The Prairie Life Nature Trail passes through the Prairies and Lakes region of Texas. Some of the plant life is identified and discussed in the following numbered paragraphs, which correspond to the numbered posts along the trail. However, additional plants and animals occur along the trail. Visitors are encouraged to keep a sharp eye out for other plant and wildlife discoveries of their own.

Plant illustrations from *Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of the Southwest* by Robert A. Vines with drawings by Sarah Kahlden Arendale, 1960, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas.

I. FLOWERING DOGWOOD

Cornus florida

GPS N 32° 21.820 W 96° 00.165

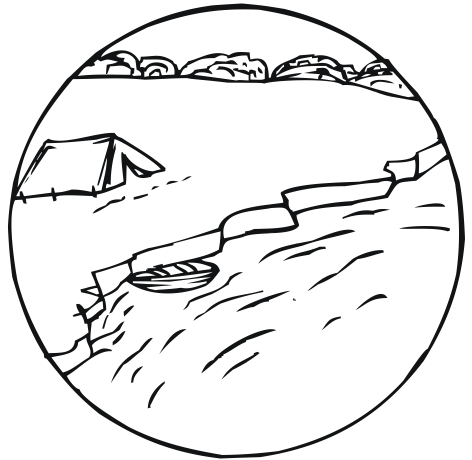


Many people are familiar with the apparent white flowers which appear profusely in springtime on these trees. What look like petals, however, actually are bracts (modified leaves). The true flowers are inconspicuous, yellowish or greenish-white structures in the center of these bracts. Bright red fruit ripen in October. These berries are eaten by deer, turkey, squirrels, and many species of birds.

2. EROSION

GPS N 32° 21.852 W 96° 00.183

Purtis Creek State Park has been a victim of water erosion, which is the removal of soil particles by water. As people or animals create a pathway for water to follow, erosion begins. When visiting parks or other natural areas, it is important that you stay on the designated hiking areas to help prevent such problems.





3. AMERICAN BEAUTY BERRY

Callicarpa americana

OTHER NAMES: French mulberry

GPS N 32° 21.857 W 96° 00.201

This deciduous shrub, 4 to 9 feet tall and wide, grows in woodlands, moist thickets and bottomlands. The medium-green leaves are up to 9 inches long with toothed edges. Pale pink flowers bloom in summer, yielding to showy dense clusters of red to purple berries which encircle the branch, forming a ball shape. The berry clusters may remain on the branches well after the leaves have dropped in the fall. The bright berries are often used in flower arrangements, as well as eaten by quail, mockingbird, catbird, robin, thrashers, cardinal, flycatchers, chickadees, warblers and several mammals. The berries are also edible for humans. Each berry contains four small seeds. The USDA has studied the leaves of American beautyberry as a potential source for insect repellent. Chemicals in the leaves have been found to repel mosquitoes, ants, ticks and flies. This plant came to the attention of researchers because of stories passed from grandfather to grandson.

4. TRIBUTARY STREAM

GPS N 32° 21.891 W 96° 00.185

A tributary stream is one that flows into another stream, river or lake. These streams are what make up Purtis Creek Lake. During drought conditions they may be dried up.



5. BLACK HICKORY

Carya texana

OTHER NAMES: Buckley hickory

GPS N 32° 21.880 W 96° 00.141

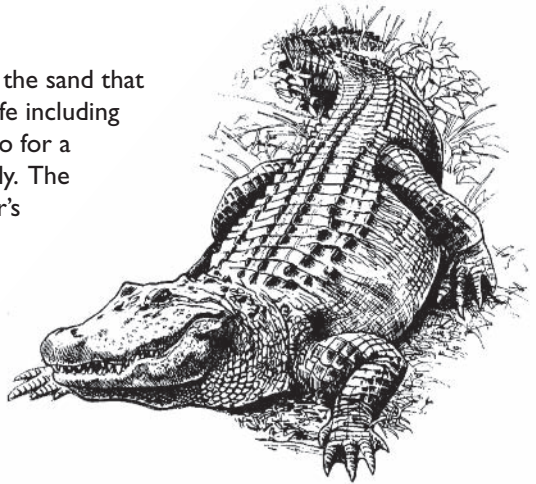


These are medium trees, growing to heights of 40 feet or more. Black hickory is very slow-growing with a rough, shaggy bark that is thick and deeply furrowed. The edible fruit, or hickory nut, is encased in a thin, split husk. Its small size makes the wood of minor commercial importance; however, the opening of hickory buds in the spring is a sight worth seeing.

6. WETLAND HABITAT

GPS N 32° 21.837 W 96° 00.080

Along bank there are slides made in the sand that are used by beavers and other wildlife including alligators. They use these slides to go for a swim or to get a drink of water easily. The big circle-shaped leaves on the water's surface are not lily pads, contrary to popular belief, because there is no split in the leaf. They are called American lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*), and beautiful yellowish white flowers bloom on a long stalk in the summer months. There is a wildlife viewing area/bird blind in this area.



7. YAUPON

Ilex vomitoria

OTHER NAMES: Cassena, Christmas-berry

GPS N 32° 21.844 W 96° 00.030



A close relative of the American holly, yaupon is a small tree, growing to 20–25 feet high on the rich bottomlands of East Texas. The leaves are 1 to 2 inches long. Male and female flowers are borne on separate plants. The fruit, a scarlet, berry-like drupe, is produced in great abundance by the female plant. Often used as ornamental shrubs, the leaves of the yaupon contain caffeine, which American Indians used to prepare a tea to induce vomiting and as a laxative.

8. PURTIS CREEK HISTORY

GPS N 32° 21.862 W 96° 00.025

Purtis Creek State Park is located in an area where the Wichita and Caddo Indians once roamed. Just east of the park, on private property, is a cliff overhang that was used by unknown Indians as a temporary shelter. Petroglyphs are carved into the rock walls that indicate this was a good hunting area. Because the area was well populated with game and had extremely fertile soil, there was an influx of Anglos in the early to mid-1800s. Many small towns and communities were established during this time. The road that lies on the south border of the park entrance was known as the Tyler to Porter's Bluff Road, a well-known stage route from East Texas to the Trinity River; this fostered the development of the busy trading post of Goshen. Along this route, just northeast of Edom near the Neches River, is the site where the famed Cherokee Indian Chief Boles was slain in the Battle of the Neches in 1839.

9. WINGED ELM

Ulmus alata

GPS N 32° 21.825 W 96° 00.020

An Eastern tree, winged elm has corky ridges (wings) on its twigs and branches. It can grow to a height of 80 feet but is usually much smaller. The leaves are deeply saw-toothed, and the long fruits have single samara-type seeds that mature in early spring. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the fibrous inner bark was made into rope for fastening covers of cotton bales. Wahoo was the Creek Indian name for this elm.



10. POST OAK

Quercus stellata

OTHER NAMES: Iron oak, cross oak, branch oak, box oak, delta post oak

GPS N 32° 21.806 W 96° 00.004



Post oak is common in dry upland woods, particularly in sandy areas, in central and eastern Texas. The leaf is variously lobed; however, the widest part of the leaf is in the middle, whereas blackjack (seen earlier) has leaves which are widest at the tip. Post oak and blackjack often are found growing together, with post oak being more abundant on richer soils and blackjack oak being more abundant on thin, infertile soils. Acorns of post oak mature in one growing season and are eaten by numerous wildlife species. Wood is used for crossties, fuel, furniture and posts.

11. HOLLOW LOG

GPS N 32° 21.913 W 95° 59.836

Most people do not recognize the importance of dead trees. They are actually the homes of many wildlife species, different types of reptiles, invertebrates, amphibians and mammals. Without these animals in the food chain, there might no longer be animals such as hawks and owls. Fungi and other decomposers also live in the fallen tree and help to release the wood's nutrients back into the soil, creating new life from the death of the tree.

12. DEVIL'S WALKING STICK

Aralia spinosa

OTHER NAMES: Hercules-club, Prickly-ash

GPS N 32° 21.919 W 95° 59.834

Without a doubt, this small, aromatic tree deserves its name! It has no branches when young, but bears huge compound leaves 3 to 4 feet long from the top of its trunk on the ends of twigs and big clusters of tiny, white flowers. Devil's walking stick can reach a height of 30 feet with multiple rings of stout spines along its length. In the autumn, blackish berries mature in clusters. Often planted as a grotesque ornamental in Victorian times, the aromatic, spicy roots and fruit were used by early settlers and Native Americans in home remedies, including a cure for toothaches.

13. POISON IVY

Rhus toxicodendron

GPS N 32° 22.010 W 95° 5.812

Many bird species eat the berries of this plant. Almost everyone is aware of the painful results when human skin comes in contact with any part of this plant.



14. POST OAK SAVANNAH

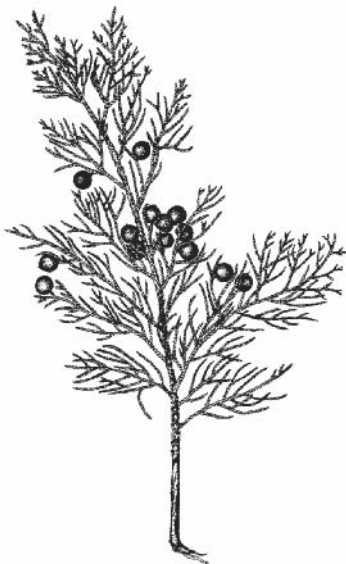
GPS N 32° 22.002 W 95° 59.920

The post oak savannah is also known as a prairie. It was created by two natural forces, fire and bison. The fire came from lightning or Native Americans' fires and their large scale kept woody plants from invading the area. Herds of bison came in hundreds, sometimes reaching up to 1,000, and consumed the grasses, later distributing the seeds in the trampled land. The early settlers of Goshen tilled the land for their farming and ranching needs, leaving the land a vast acreage of low trees and grasses.

15. EASTERN RED CEDAR

Juniperus virginiana

GPS N 32° 21.947 W 95° 59.964



Male and female cones of this evergreen species normally, but not always, occur on separate trees. The wood is used for posts, millwork, paneling and pencils. The wood is highly aromatic and is considered to be insect repellent. The berry-like fruit is eaten by numerous species of birds and other wildlife. Eastern red cedar grows well in open habitats such as old fields because it is sun-adapted and drought-resistant. It is able to continue PHOTOSYNTHESIS (the process by which sunlight, water and carbon dioxide are transformed into carbohydrate and oxygen) at high and low temperatures and low water levels. Photosynthesis may occur even at 32°F; therefore, this tree has a very long growing season. This species is intolerant of shade and does not occur in mature forests. It thrives in very shallow and poor soils.

PURTIS CREEK STATE PARK ECOSYSTEM

This park is a community. Some plants and animals produce food, some provide shelter, and still others (scavengers) remove dead individuals. These plants and animals depend upon one another for survival and, through careful conservation and sound management, will remain here for a long time.

While experiencing the beauty of the park, take time to appreciate the sights and sounds that have been lost in most urban settings. Allow yourself to be enriched by the nature that surrounds you. While doing so:

- Please help us keep the scenery beautiful and assure continued use of this natural and cultural resource by keeping it litter free.
- Help wild animals stay on a healthy, natural diet while minimizing animal contact with visitors. This discourages them from digging through campsites for food. Feeding wild animals is prohibited at all state parks.
- Help researchers link us to our past by not disturbing archeological sites.
- Wildlife and resource management will help preserve our heritage for future generations. Please be aware of fire bans in the park.



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