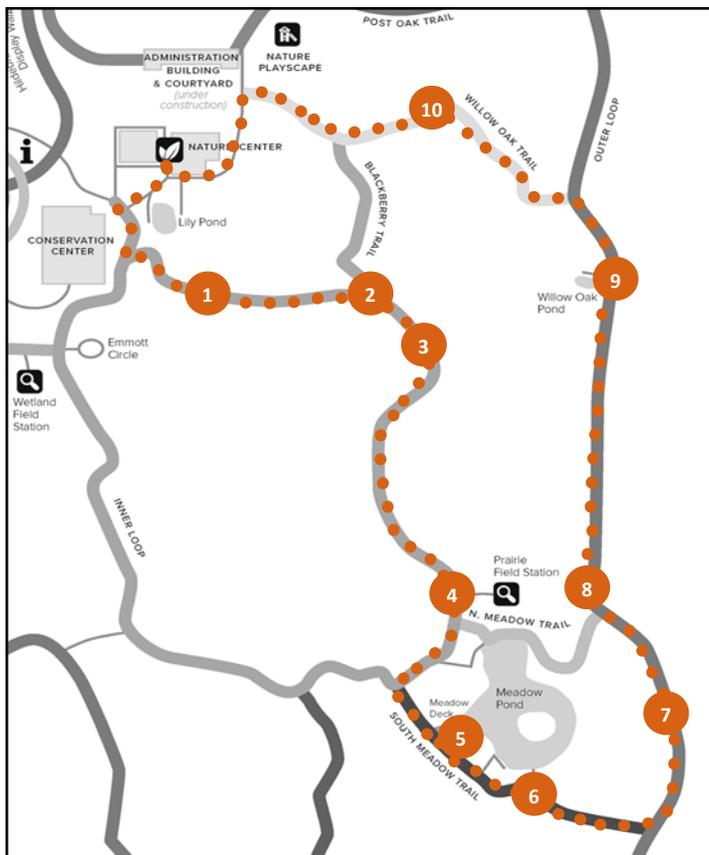


Habitat Hike: Prairie



About the Hike

This self-guided hike should take about 35-45 minutes. The path is a mixture of mulch, boardwalk, and gravel. Distance: 1 mile.

The Arboretum Prairie is a window into Houston's past. Historically, thousands of acres of grassland and wildflowers covered the area that would become the city of Houston. Buffalo and frequent natural fires would keep the prairie clear of trees. Today, we keep trees and shrubs away by mowing and weeding.

1 Fallen Post Oak

Look for the huge, fallen post oak tree on your left. This tree died during the drought of 2011. Tree roots usually only reach a few feet below the surface, making them vulnerable to strong wind, fire, floods, and drought. Grass roots can reach up to 14 feet deep, allowing them to survive and thrive in conditions that would kill a tree.

2 Eastern Red Cedar

At the intersection of the Inner Loop and Blackberry trails you will find a large eastern red cedar tree. Look up to see the feathery, green needles and touch the soft, shredded bark. Red cedars are often the first trees to grow back after wildfires or droughts.

3 Hollow Pine



Not far down the trail you will see a huge loblolly pine tree on your left. Look at the base of the trunk to find a large hole. We think the hole is an old scar left by a fire in the 1940s. In the past, fires like this would sweep through the area and clear out whole chunks of forest, maintaining open prairie and savanna.

4 Prairie Field Station



Do you see a light shining from the trail on your left? Turn and pass through a dense tunnel of trees until you finally emerge at the edge of the prairie. At the Prairie Field Station you can learn all about this resilient habitat, and admire amazing views of the open sky.

Being in Nature

Being part of the natural world means being good stewards, taking responsibility for our environment, for ourselves, and for each other. Slow down for nature—no jogging or biking. Look and listen, but stay on the trails. Leave no trace—carry out what you carry in. Leash and clean up after pets. Be kind and stay safe!

5 Meadow Deck

Walk up the ramp to the elevated Meadow Deck. Watch for hawks soaring overhead, turtles basking on logs, and maybe a baby alligator cruising through the water. Prairie ponds are crucial habitat, especially for migrating birds and dragonflies. Look for some of our 30 species of dragonflies in spring and summer.



6 Bur Oak and Red Maple

At the southern edge of the Meadow Pond, look for a fence shaded by a huge bur oak and a slightly smaller red maple. These majestic trees are not crowded by neighbors here at the edge of the woodland, and so they grow wide, spreading branches. In the fall the maple turns a brilliant red.



7 Prairie Panorama

The prairie grows and changes color through the year. Grasses grow from tiny spring sprouts to summer giants. They develop silvery or golden seed heads in fall, then die back in winter. Different flowers bloom at different times. In early summer, look for fuzzy purple blazing stars. You might see tall clusters of yellow goldenrod blooms in late fall.



8 Mason Bee House

The north side of the prairie is lower and wetter. Here you can find the dark green, spiky stems of sedges. In the fall, this area is crowded with golden swamp sunflowers that attract butterflies and mason bees. We put up a bee house to give our pollinators a place to rest and lay their eggs.

9 Willow Oak Pond

You have just walked along the Outer Loop trail from the open prairie back into a dense wooded area. The Willow Oak Pond is a quiet spot among the trees where you can sit in the shade. Check the tree stumps for striped five-lined skinks and listen for the splash of frogs leaping into the water.

10 Savanna Bend

On your right you can see our restored savanna habitat. Savannas are a mix of grasses and trees, forming a transition between prairie and woodland. You will see many of the same grasses and wildflowers here that live in the prairie, and the same oaks and pines that grow in the woodland.

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Join: Become a member to support our mission and enjoy benefits like free parking and discounts on programs

Volunteer: Get outside and get back into nature through active and support activities

Check us out at www.houstonarboretum.org

