FONTAINEBLEAU STATE PARK

nature trail guide
The following is information relating to the plants highlighted on the Fontainebleau Nature Trail—identification aids for, facts about, and uses of many of its trees, shrubs, and vines. Please enjoy the Fontainebleau Nature Trail and use this trail guide to gain in your environmental awareness and appreciation.

All plants and animals are protected on Fontainebleau State Park, so no collecting is allowed. No camping is allowed in the Nature Trail area, and no pets are allowed on the trail, so wildlife will not be disturbed.

Please do not litter—help us keep the park clean.

The Nature Trail loop is slightly more than one mile long and comes out of the woods at the Allee of Oaks and returns to the trailhead. Be sure to learn to recognize poison ivy, and, during warm months, be sure to use some form of insect repellent so that your nature walk will be a more enjoyable one, both during and after your visit.

Walk slowly along the trail, listen to the sounds of the forest and marsh, and watch quietly for activity in the trees and grasses. You may be surprised at what you see and hear...
1. *Pinus taeda* - Loblolly Pine

This species of pine comprise approximately one-half of the Deep South's coniferous forest. They can attain heights of 150 feet and diameters of six feet. The Loblolly Pine needles are in clusters of threes and are six to nine inches long. The name "Loblolly" was given to this tree by early settlers, who associated the wet areas where these pines often grew with a lumpy gruel by that name. Squirrels and woodpeckers favor these pines in their search for food (cones or insects) and nesting space.

2. *Liquidambar styraciflua* - Sweetgum

In the spring, Fontainebleau's deep woods gleam with the lustrous, green foliage of its many Sweetgum trees. In the autumn, these same star-shaped leaves paint the forest canopy with beautiful reds and yellows. Prickly fruitballs encase its seeds, which are eaten by songbirds, turkeys, and squirrels. Its name "Sweetgum" refers to the hardened clumps of tree sap which can be chewed.

3. *Rubus species* - Blackberry

Raspberries, dewberries, and blackberries form a complex bramble of prickly shrubs. The species of *Rubus* have leaves with three to five leaflets and white flowers with five petals. The blackberry plant produces its sweet fruit in May and is popular with everyone. It can be enjoyed off the vine, as a jelly, a cold drink, or tea. A wide variety of Fontainebleau's wildlife, from white-tailed deer and raccoon to box turtles and cardinals, also eat the tasty blackberry. Thick brier-patches often serve as shelters for smaller animals, a refuge from predators.

4. *Quercus nigra* - Water Oak

There is much hybridization between oak species which often presents challenges in leaf identification. Typically though a Water Oak leaf is some three inches long, spatula-shaped, and falls by late winter. Its common name refers to its common natural habitat, floodplains. Water Oaks are subject to attack by the parasitic plant, Mistletoe. In the month of April, oak trees, particularly are also infested with the "stinging caterpillar", the larvae stage of the Buck Moth.
5. *Callicarpa americana* - French Mulberry

The French Mulberry is a deciduous shrub that grows abundantly in Fontainebleau's shaded woods as well as in open, drier habitats. The flowers and fruits grow in the axils of the opposite leaves. The brilliant, lavender berries of this shrub, also known as American Beauty Berry, are produced in the fall and are eaten by many species of birds and mammals, including raccoon, opossum, armadillo, gray fox, and white-tailed deer.

6. *Ilex opaca* - American Holly

At Christmas-time the foliage and fruit of this evergreen tree are widely used for holiday decorations. The red berries are produced by the female plant only and provide many birds with a food source through the winter. The American Holly is the largest member of the holly family and is widely distributed as an understory tree in Louisiana's mixed hardwood forests.

7. *Rhus radicans* - Poison Ivy

This high-climbing, deciduous vine (or ground cover) is the most notorious plant of the woods. Its stem is supported by hair-like rootlets. The leaves, which vary in size, shape, and seasonal color, can be best identified by their 3-foliate arrangement; "LEAVES OF THREE, LET IT BE." Despite its unpopularity with humans, poison ivy provides food for a variety of wildlife including woodpeckers, who can often be seen dangling from the vine eating its berries.

8. *Vitis species* - "Wild Grape"

By late summer, this high-climbing vine with shredding bark bears delicious purple grapes. If wildlife has not already eaten the fruit, wild grapes, particularly Muscadine, can also be enjoyed as a drink, jelly, or cooked green. Young grape leaves from this deciduous vine are also edible; after being boiled they can be used to wrap rice or meat for baking. This and other high-climbing vines do much to give Fontainebleau's woods its beautiful color.
9. **Smilax bona-nox** - Saw Greenbrier

This prickly vine with its angled stem may either clamber low or climb with its clasping tendrils. By late winter, most of its heart-shaped leaves have fallen. Saw Greenbrier, also known as Catbrier, bears a cluster of black fruit in the summer which is eaten by a variety of wildlife including marsh rabbits, opossum, raccoon, turkey, bobwhite quail, woodpeckers, and cardinals.

10. **Acer rubrum** - Red Maple

The Red Maple is one of Louisiana's few native trees to produce vibrant crimson colors. Its scarlet flowers and winged fruit (samaras) produced in February and its brilliantly colored leaves in the autumn brighten Fontainebleau's landscape. Its seeds are eaten by squirrels and birds. This variety, the Drummond Red Maple, is more common to the swampy wetlands, and is characterized by the downy, white coating on the under-neath side of the maple leaf.

**MARSH OVERLOOK**

The Louisiana Office of State Parks is currently developing plans for construction of a marsh overlook structure and associated boardwalk to facilitate the observation of this extremely interesting and important habitat.

Supporting a unique and varied assemblage of plant and animal life, the marsh provides a "nursery-ground" for many economically important species of fishes and shellfish as well as a number of other life forms which make up the intricate links in food webs of this ecological community. Marshes provide feeding grounds for many bird species and some mammals. These, of course, are some of the most conspicuous members of this community and can be observed with some regularity at this vantage point along the Nature Trail.

11. **Daubentonia punicea** - Rattlebox

This non-native shrub, which grows on the marsh's edge, produces a bonnet-shaped flower in the summer. A native of Brazil, Rattlebox has escaped cultivation and is widely distributed along the Gulf Coast prairie. A member of the legume family, its common name refers to the sound of its dried bean pod.

12. **Baccharis halimifolia** - Groundsel-bush

This small, twiggy shrub, so common through the marsh, can also be found in the open woods, prairies, or along rivers. The white seeds of the Groundsel-bush, also known as Cottonseed-bush, are very conspicuous in the autumn and are dispersed by the wind. The toothed leaves are shed by late winter.