Louisiana State Arboretum
State Preservation Area

Louisiana
STATE PARKS

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The Louisiana State Arboretum is a delightful and enchanting place to visit for the most enthusiastic naturalist, as well as for someone just beginning to discover the beauties of nature. An expert will immediately recognize the Arboretum as an excellent example of a mature Beech-Magnolia forest. Others will simply enjoy walking the paths of one of Louisiana’s most beautiful, inspirational and quiet woodlands.

While a park is usually designed for recreational use, an arboretum is a less contrived section of land containing either natural growth or planting, grown for scientific or educational purposes. Many trees, shrubs, and flowers are labeled and easily accessible to curious fingertips, transforming the area into a living botanical museum.

**Arboretums Through the Years**

Arboretums are certainly not new. Oriental emperor Shen Ming had one 2,800 years before the birth of Christ, and Aristotle designed one in Athens as an education forum. Royal courts throughout Europe began developing botanical gardens during the 1300s, and the United States National Arboretum was established in 1927.
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The Louisiana State Arboretum is large—more than 300 acres of natural growth, embellished with additional plantings of species that are indigenous to the state. Atypical of the terrain in the Louisiana prairieland, the topography of the Arboretum is varied and dramatic. The landscape ranges from nearly flat along the Walker Branch of Lake Chicot to relatively steep slopes along the terrace ridges. Due to this great variation in topography, almost every type of Louisiana vegetation, except coastal marsh and prairie, is represented on the site.

Rustic bridges and several miles of trails have been constructed to lead the visitor through the network of hills, ravines, and creeks that support the Arboretum’s myriad species of flora. Centuries-old giant beech, magnolia, oak, and ash trees can be viewed from atop the many ridges in the area.

Take a Tour

At the entrance to the Arboretum the Caroline Dormon Lodge can be found. The lodge was dedicated to the late naturalist, author, and artist in 1965. Miss Dormon, reputedly the first woman forester, spearheaded the drive to create a state arboretum. An interpretive shelter, with public restrooms and educational exhibits on a variety of botanical subjects, is adjacent to the lodge. Start your tour here and you’ll immediately encounter a “cowcumber” or big leaf magnolia, which grows only in certain areas of Louisiana. Nature trails take you deeper into the wooded areas and longer trails take you along Walker Branch or Ferguson’s Gully where several of the footpaths converge.

If you walk the trails quietly, you’ll discover that sycamores,
maples, beeches, magnolias, hickories, ferns, and crane fly orchids are not the only living things in the arboretum. There's a good chance that you'll encounter some two-and four-legged critters, too: white-tail deer, wild turkey, raccoon, opossum, fox, skunk, squirrel, and numerous species of birds.

**Touch but Don't Destroy**

Established in 1961, the Louisiana State Arboretum was the first such area in the South and the first state-supported arboretum in the United States. To help preserve the Arboretum for future generations, removing or damaging any plants or animals is strictly prohibited. Pets and picnicking are not allowed on the grounds due to the preservation status of this site. Picnic grounds and camping facilities are available at nearby Chicot State Park.

**Nearby Attractions:**

**Chicot State Park**—(7 miles North of Ville Platte on LA 3042)—The park covers 6,000 acres of rolling hills and includes a fish-rich 2,000-acre reservoir. Picnicking, swimming in the Olympic-sized pool, hiking, bicycling, and birding are popular activities. Also available are 200 improved campsites, backpacking camps, primitive group campsites, 27 vacation cabins, three lodges, nature/hiking/backpacking trails encircling the lake, playgrounds, and pavilions.

**Prairie Acadian Cultural Center-Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve**—(250 W. Park Ave., Eunice)—The Center depicts the heritage of the Prairie Acadians. Artifacts, exhibits, and live demonstrations portray aspects of this unique culture.

**Acadian Town of Ville Platte**—(On US 167 and LA 10 north of US 190)—Ville Platte means “flat town” in French. Its strong agrarian and Cajun traditions and cultural influences can still be found in the spoken French and the music and food of the area.

**Historic Town of Opelousas**—(At the intersection of US 190 and I-49)—The Confederate capital of Louisiana during the Civil War, it was also the boyhood home of the legendary Jim Bowie.

**Historic Town of Washington**—(On LA 103, just west of I-49)—Once the largest steamboat port between New Orleans and St. Louis, the town preserves its 19th-century architecture and offers an antique mall and shops.

Botanists, horticulturists, college students, youth groups, solitary nature lovers, and people of all ages are all attracted to this beautiful and fascinating place. No matter how you walk along the trails—whether carefully, with the attentive eye of a scientist, or at full tilt with the carefree heart of a child—the Louisiana State Arboretum promises to be a memorable experience. Enjoy and please remember—take only pictures, leave only footprints.

**Zydeco Cajun Prairie Scenic Byway**—The byway traces the historic towns, musical traditions, and culture of the Prairie Acadians.

**Liberty Theatre/City of Eunice**—(200 W. Park Ave., Eunice)—“Rendez-vous des Cajuns” is a Saturday night live radio show featuring Cajun & Zydeco music in the style of the Grand Ole Opry.

**Crooked Creek Park**—(West of Pine Prairie and US 167 on LA 3187)—This piney woods area features a 400 acre lake with boat launch for boating, fishing, skiing, a swimming beach, fishing pier, camping area, nature trail, and picnic area.

**Thistlethwaite Wildlife Management Area**—(Off I-49 north of Opelousas and southeast of Chicot State Park)—This 11,000-acre area of bottomland hardwoods is managed for wildlife. Visitors may hunt (in season), day-hike, bird watch, and view wildlife.
The Louisiana State Arboretum (4213 Chicot Park Road, Ville Platte, LA 70586, 318-363-6289 or 1-888-677-6100) is located on Louisiana Highway 304 approximately eight miles north of Ville Platte in Evangeline Parish and a mile and a half from the entrance of Chicot State Park. Groups of ten or more can schedule a tour by appointment. Regular science and nature programs are scheduled on all weekends in the summer and special programs are conducted throughout the year. Call for a monthly calendar of events.

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