

Welcome to the Panther Path Interpretive Signs at the Elementary School Trails. Along this trail are twenty signs providing information on a variety of woodland plants and features common to Connecticut forests. The numbers on the signs and trail map correspond to the information presented below. We hope you enjoy the walk and encourage you to investigate the rest of the Elementary School Trail system.

1

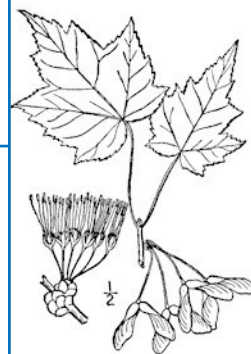
Red Maple

Scientific Name: *Acer rubrum*

Size: 60 to 90 feet; leaves 2 to 4 inches long usually with 3 palmate lobes.

Habitat: widespread in the eastern U.S. from Maine to Florida.

This tree is to the left of the sign. Also known as Swamp Maple, it often can be found in wet soils, although it can grow almost anywhere. Leaves turn brilliant red in the fall. It is the state tree of Rhode Island.



2

Lowbush Blueberry

Scientific Name: *Vaccinium angustifolium*

Size: low growing shrub, 12" to 24" tall.

Habitat: widespread in the northeast U.S. and eastern Canada.

In the spring look for bell shaped white flowers, green and blue fruit in the summer and red leaves in the fall. It is grown commercially in Maine (where it is the state fruit) and Canada mainly from managed wild patches.

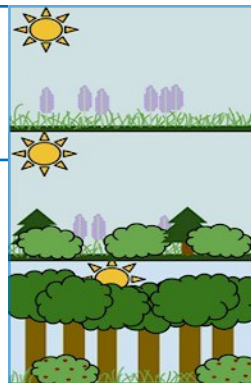


3

Changing Forest

Trees change as the forest matures.

The trees found on this part of the trail represent mid to late succession species. Eventually the taller hardwood Oak, Maple, Beech and Hickory trees will replace the Red Cedar and Birch trees to become a mature forest. Also seen here is the more unusual Pig-nut Hickory.



4

Sassafras and Native Rock Cairn

Scientific Name: *Sassafras albidum*

Sassafras has three shapes of leaves, oval, "mitten", and three-lobed forms, all of which may be found on the same branch. When crushed, the leaves will have a very aromatic smell (some liken it to root beer). Look to the base of the sign and you will see a circular pile of stones, several stones deep. It's origin is lost to time but someone carefully arranged them. Perhaps an old property boundary marker or just a fastidious field hand.



5

Fallen Trees

Trees fall in the forest for a variety of reasons and are necessary to maintaining a healthy forest ecosystem. These fallen trees will slowly decay due to fungi, bacteria and insects, while providing habitat for small animals. The opening where the tree was also lets additional light reach the forest floor allowing new plants and trees to grow.



6

Moss and Lichen

Scientific Name (Moss): Division: Bryophyta

Moss usually grows close together in clumps in damp or shady locations. Moss does not have flowers or seeds. At certain times, they produce spores.

Lichen is a flat pale green to grey patch on rocks and tree bark. It is a combination of fungus and algae growing in a symbiotic relationship. The fungus provides a structure and the algae provides nutrients through photosynthesis.



7

Wolf Tree

Scientific Name: Depends on tree species

A "wolf tree" is a large forest tree with a broad spreading crown that limits the growth of smaller trees around it. This wolf tree has fallen and is returning to soil by the activity of insects, bacteria and fungi. A standing wolf tree can be seen near Sign #10. Also seen in this area is an evergreen herbaceous woodland flower *Pyrola*. Veined green leaf rosettes support 2-8" flower spikes in summer. Seed pods can be found late into the fall.



8

American Beech

Scientific Name: *Fagus grandifolia*

Size: 65 to 115 feet; leaves 2.5 to 4.5 inches long with small teeth.

Habitat: widespread in the eastern U.S. and Canada.

Look to the left. In late fall and winter leaves can be seen clinging to the Beech tree. The wood is slightly reddish-brown and is used for furniture, flooring, and even wooden spoons. The beechnuts are a food source for a wide variety of animals.



9

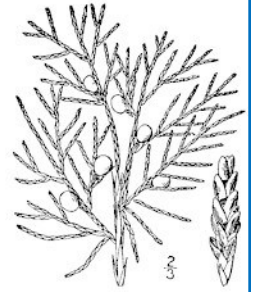
Eastern Red Cedar

Scientific Name: *Juniperus virginiana*

Size: 10 to 40 feet; small scale-like evergreen leaves.

Habitat: eastern and central U.S. from Maine to Georgia.

Look to the left. It is a pioneer species being one of the first to repopulate cleared land. The reddish-brown aromatic wood is used in cedar chests to control moths. The rot resistant wood has widely been used for fence posts.



10

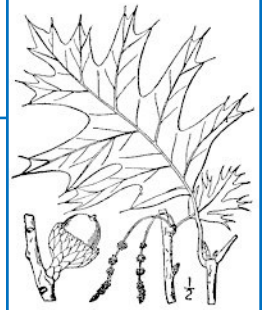
Black Oak

Scientific Name: *Quercus velutina*

Size: 65 to 80 feet; leaves 4 to 8 inches long with 5 to 7 pointed lobes.

Habitat: eastern and central U.S. from Maine to Georgia.

Black oak is used as construction lumber, fence posts, furniture, flooring, and firewood. The acorns are an important food source for a variety of forest animals. When these old fields were first cleared for farming a few oaks were left as seed trees.



11

Vernal Pool

Vernal: relating to spring (e.g. vernal equinox)

Size: usually small and shallow with no defined inlet or outlet.

Habitat: anywhere

Vernal pools are temporary bodies of water that are wet in the spring but usually dry out by summer. Because they typically are dry part of the year, they do not contain fish, but are a prime habitat for salamanders, frogs, toads, and fairy shrimp.



12

Hayscented Fern on edge of Abandoned Beaver Pond

Scientific Name: *Dennstaedtia punctilobula*

Very common fern often found carpeting the forest floor. It is named "hay-scented" because some people think the crushed leaves smell like freshly mown hay. This area was formerly an active beaver site with dam, ponding water and hutch. With the beavers gone, the area now reverts to the forest wetland, containing a running stream. The beaver chewed logs and stumps will remain visible for decades.

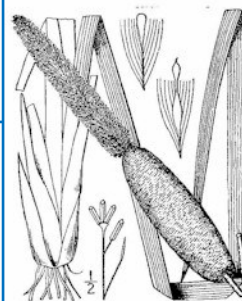


13

Cattails

Scientific Name: *Typha latifolia*

Cattails can be found in wetlands and grows in standing water. The brown flower head splits open in the fall, releasing the fluffy seeds that are then dispersed by the wind. In many areas, cattails are being displaced by the more aggressive *Phragmites* (common reed) as both grow in the same type of wet habitat.



14

Highbush Blueberry

Scientific Name: *Vaccinium corymbosum*

Size: 6 to 12 feet tall; oval leaves are about 2 inches long

Habitat: widespread in the eastern U.S. from Maine to Georgia.

The highbush blueberry is the most common commercially grown blueberry in the U.S. producing 1/4" to 1/2" round blue berries. The berries of wild bushes provide food for birds, bears and small animals. It is the state fruit of New Jersey.



15

Autumn Olive

Scientific Name: *Elaeagnus umbellata*

Size: up to 12 feet tall; leaves 2 to 4 inches long.

Habitat: widespread in the eastern U.S. from Maine to Florida.

Autumn olives were once widely planted along highways and for landscaping, however, they are now considered an invasive species. They are hardy and fast growing, have fragrant white flowers, and produce clusters of small red berries.



16

Stone Wall

(dry rubble construction)

In earlier times, stone walls typically surrounded cemeteries, cow pastures, farms, or animal pounds. The walls were constructed of stones removed from the adjacent fields. As recently as the mid 1950s, parts of the woods along the "Panther Path" were open fields. In winter this is a vantage point to observe the rolling topography and bedrock outcrops that delineate this small valley.



17

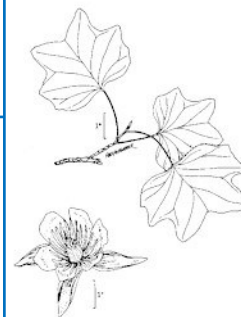
Tulip Tree

Scientific Name: *Liriodendron tulipifera*

Size: 70 to 100 feet; leaves 4 to 8 inches long tulip shaped.

Habitat: eastern U.S. from Connecticut to Florida.

Also known as Yellow Poplar, although it is not a true poplar, but actually a member of the magnolia family. The tree can be identified by its distinctive tulip shaped leaves and tulip shaped flowers. It is the state tree of Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee.



18

Black Birch

Scientific Name: *Betula lenta*

Size: 50 to 60 feet; oval leaves 2 to 4 inches with finely serrated edges.

Habitat: southern New England and Appalachian mountains.

Also known as Sweet Birch because the twigs smell of wintergreen when crushed. Birch sap can be boiled like maple sap, but the syrup is stronger, like molasses. The leaves are eaten by a variety of moth and butterfly caterpillars.



19

Sugar Maple

Scientific Name: *Acer saccharum*

Size: 60 to 90 feet; leaves are roughly 8 inches with 5 palmate lobes.

Habitat: New England thru the great lakes region.

Best known for its sap which is collected and turned into maple syrup. Its wood is also used for furniture, flooring, musical instruments and bowling pins. A sugar maple leaf is on the national flag of Canada and it is the state tree of Vermont, New York, West Virginia and Wisconsin.



20

American Hornbeam

Scientific Name: *Carpinus caroliniana*

Size: 20 to 30 feet; oval leaves 1 to 4 inches with finely serrated edges.

Habitat: eastern U.S. from Maine to Georgia

It is also known as Ironwood because the timber is hard and durable, however, its small size limits the wood's usefulness to smaller objects such as fence posts, tool handles, and walking sticks. It often has a crooked and fluted trunk.



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