

18 MORTON ARBORETUM EAST HIKE



KEY AT-A-GLANCE INFORMATION

LENGTH: 5 miles

CONFIGURATION: 2 connected loops

DIFFICULTY: Easy

SCENERY: Rolling hills, dense woods, oak savannas, and prairie

EXPOSURE: Mostly covered

SURFACE: Woodchips, dirt

HIKING TIME: 2.5 hours

DRIVING DISTANCE: 35 miles from Millennium Park, downtown Chicago

ACCESS: April–October, 7 a.m.–7 p.m.; November–March, 7 a.m.–5 p.m. Cost is \$9 for adults, \$8 for seniors, \$6 for children.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: No

FACILITIES: Restrooms, benches, picnic tables, water, visitor center, cafe, arboretum shop, public phone

MAPS: Maps available from the attendant at the gate or on Morton Arboretum's website, mortonarb.org; USGS topo Wheaton, IL

SPECIAL COMMENTS: Runners are asked to use the roads rather than the trails. Cross-country skiing is not allowed. For information about guided tours on an open-air tram, inquire at the visitor center.

At the visitor center, learn about scores of classes the arboretum offers. For more information call the main office at (630) 968-0074 or visit the arboretum's website at mortonarb.org.



GPS TRAILHEAD COORDINATES

Latitude 413056
Longitude 4629958

IN BRIEF

Want to check out trees from places such as Korea or Appalachia? Or maybe you'd like to see a sampling of the 43 types of oak trees and 60 types of maple trees that grow here. Tree lovers could be busy for weeks exploring the hundreds of types of trees grouped according to geographical origin, species, and habitat. But trees are just part of the appeal of this place. The gently rolling terrain offers plenty of scenic beauty in the way of native woodlands, savannas, streams, marshes, and ponds.

DESCRIPTION

Occupying 1,700 acres of rolling wooded terrain and bisected by the East Branch of the DuPage River, the Morton Arboretum will captivate anyone with even a slight interest in woody vegetation. Joy Morton, founder of the Morton Salt Company, established the arboretum on his country estate in 1922. Morton's arboreal interests were passed down to him

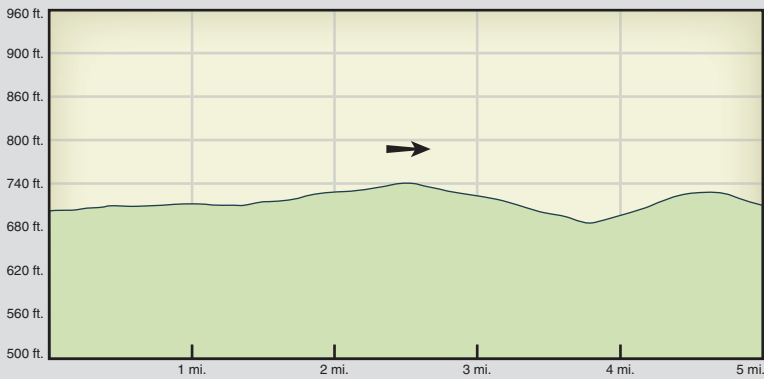
Directions



From Chicago, take I-290 west to I-88. Follow I-88 for 10.5 miles until reaching IL 53. The entrance to Morton Arboretum is just a quarter mile north on IL 53, on the right. After paying at the gate and receiving a map, follow Main Route East Side for 2.5 miles until reaching the Big Rock Visitor Station, which will appear on the right side of the road.

Public transportation: The arboretum is located 1.5 miles away from the Lisle station on the BNSF Railway Metra line. From the north side of the station, head west on Burlington Avenue. Turn right (north) on Lincoln Avenue (IL 53). Use care while walking or riding along Lincoln Avenue—it's a busy road. The entrance to the arboretum is on the right after passing under I-88.

Morton Arboretum East Hike





Winter at the Morton Arboretum is a good time to look for animal tracks.

from his father, Julius Sterling Morton, who served as Secretary of Agriculture under President Grover Cleveland and founded Arbor Day (typically the last Friday in April, but the date varies from state to state).

Joy Morton's plan for the arboretum was to gather trees and shrubs from around the world that could live in the Northern Illinois climate. In the first year, the arboretum planted 138,000 trees; now there are some 3,400 varieties of plants and trees, many of them organized according to botanical groups (such as elm, maple, oak, willow, and spruce trees) and geographical origins (such as Japan, China, Appalachia, and Northern Illinois). Mixed in with this extraordinary collection of trees and shrubs are a variety of gardens highlighting herbs, native plants, and hedges.

Most of this hike follows the outer edge of what's called the Main Trail, which is a series of four connected loops, numbered from west to east. Facing the Big Rock Visitor Station, look for Main Trail Loop 3 to the left, heading west across the park road from the shelter. Passing a picnic spot, the trail enters rolling open terrain with the occasional bluebird house attached to a post. At 0.2 mile, you'll see a connector trail that runs left into a bulb meadow and through collections of beech and maple trees. Continuing on the Main Trail, you'll cross a park road and soon enter flat, dense woodland with the occasional stand of spruce. At a half mile into the hike, where the woodland gives way to shrubby trees and more open space, you'll cross a wooden footbridge spanning a small ravine.

Up ahead, as the trail crosses the park road, a sign indicates that the plants of Appalachia have been planted in this area. After passing another connector trail on the left, the path runs next to one striking Appalachian specimen—the northern catalpa tree, identified by its long, thin, bean-like fruit and large showy flowers that bloom in the spring. Gradually descending a gentle hill, the trail is

accompanied by a small stream on the right. At 1 mile into the hike, a sign on the right announces the beginning of the Geographical Trail, a short loop showcasing the trees of China and Japan. Continuing on the Main Trail, you'll pass a collection of maples and then cross a service road that brings you into a collection of azaleas, rhododendrons, and other types of ornamental shrubs. The trail quickly rises to a small stone platform with a couple of benches. Behind the bench on the right is an eastern-rebdu tree, which produces masses of pink flowers in early spring; behind the other bench is another flowering tree, the wild black cherry.

From the benches, take the trail to the left past plantings of locust, honeysuckle, and viburnum trees. In the open space on the right are a small pond and the park road at the far edge of a clearing. As the trail enters an area with plants from Korea, look for trees common in Asia—such as mock orange and koyama spruce—that are marked on the side of the trail. After passing a grouping of large hedges, the Crowley Marsh appears on the right, soon followed by a connector trail on the left. Cross the park road and you'll enter an area planted with trees from the buckeye family. As the trail curls around Burr Reed Marsh, you'll mount a short boardwalk and viewing platform that offers an ideal spot from which to look for birds during migratory months.

Passing another small pond and another connector trail, keep straight ahead as you enter a savanna and woodland area containing 43 types of oaks from around the world. Among these you'll find six main types of oaks growing in the Chicago region: white, swamp white, bur, black, red, and northern pin. After leaving the oaks, cross the park road and then pass by parking lot 7. Keep straight ahead at the next junction that appears alongside a winding creek bed.

Here the trail straightens and starts to gradually rise as it cuts through a fairly dense woodland. The stands of shrubs and abundant deadfall seem to draw in the critters. On one of my visits to this corner of the arboretum a couple of days after a snowfall, the hiking trail was crisscrossed with countless animal trails, some apparently used by more than one type of animal. Raccoons, mice, squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, and deer all left behind their imprints. Along this section of the trail in winter, I've also seen large patches of ground where deer had kicked up oak leaves from underneath the snow—presumably to find a stray acorn or two.

Stay to the left at the sign for parking lot 13, and then cross the park road again. After crossing over a bridge, the trail slopes down leisurely while accompanying a dry streambed. Crossing the road again, the landscape regains its rolling quality. Here, the trail skirts a wooded hillside above a picturesque ravine sprinkled with fallen trees. Soon, on the left, you'll pass a trail that leads—if you care to take it—to a plot of spruce trees. Continuing straight ahead brings you back to the Big Rock Visitor Station.

For a quick introduction to the types of environments within this section of the arboretum, follow the short paved path bordering the backside of the visitor station and peruse the informational signs along the way.

Find the beginning of the Big Rock section of the hike next to the shelter. Fifty yards ahead, turn right at two closely spaced trail junctions. After the second junction, the trail proceeds alongside a small stream on the right that has carved a shallow ravine. Growing in these low spots amid the deadfall are trees tolerant of moist soil, such as red oaks, basswood, and green ash. As the trail swings left and slowly starts to rise, you'll see trees that require drier ground, such as white oak, maple, and ironwood. Off to the right, the landscape drops down toward power lines and a marshy area. While the trail curves, dips, and rises through fairly dense woodland, keep an eye out for a few enormous white oaks (growing to 100 feet, the white oak—the Illinois state tree—has wide-spreading branches, leaves with rounded lobes, and ashen-gray bark that is plated and scaly). After passing a junction on the left, the trail gradually descends toward a rock the size of a small car.

Weighing in at 12 to 14 tons, the Big Rock hitched a ride on a glacier many thousands of years ago from either northern Michigan or Canada. Geologists point to particular surface scratches on the rock and its position on the ground as possible evidence that farmers moved it out of the adjoining field about 100 years ago. Up until the 1980s, the clearing west of the rock operated as a hayfield.

Passing a trail junction on the left, proceed straight ahead into the former hayfield. Now a restored prairie, this big open space is bordered by oaks and a few stands of birches. After a quarter-mile hike through the prairie, the trail crosses a two-wheel track, then enters a savanna that is often alive with avian activity: look for woodpeckers, flickers, juncos, and cedar waxwings in the winter and a host of migrating species such as warblers, vireos, and scarlet tanagers in the spring and fall. Local birdwatchers say that the arboretum's variety of plants and berries makes it one of the better bird-watching spots in the area. After crossing a small bridge, the trail gradually turns left, then starts to rise into dense woods. Stay right at the next two trail junctions on your way back to the Big Rock Visitor Station.