

Native Texas Park Scavenger Hunt—Spring

Welcome to the prairie! Blackland Prairie used to dominate the Dallas region. Today, only 1% of the prairie remains in the state of Texas. Rediscovery of the lost prairie was the inspiration for this community park. During your walk you will learn some history of the prairie, identify native Texas plants and the wildlife they attract, and get a look at the future of managing rainwater run-off in an environmentally sustainable way. Don't worry if you can't find everything on our list during your first visit. The park is free and open to the public every day of the year, from sunrise to sunset. Each season brings beautiful changes to the prairie landscape here. Please come back again!



1. Bike Racks—Biking in the urban environment is becoming very popular as both an alternative form of transportation and good exercise. President Bush likes to bike for fun and for exercise on the trails at his Prairie Chapel Ranch.

Let's talk about it:

What are some of the problems we need to solve in order to make biking to school and to work easier?



2. Habituurf—This mix of native grasses, used throughout the grounds and Great Lawn, was developed by Texas researchers in order to conserve the natural resource of water. It is drought-resistant, needs little fertilizer, and needs mowing only 3-4 times a year!

Let's talk about it:

Sit down and examine this lawn. How does it differ from your lawn at home?



3. Seep—This wall of stacked limestone serves as a barrier that keeps stormwater from the lawns and parking lot from rushing into the swale below. Instead, the water slowly trickles out joints in the wall for days after a rain. The seep's micro climate supports shade and moisture-loving plants such as Maidenhair Fern, Wood Fern, Spider Lily, Buttonbush, and Spicebush.

Let's talk about it:

Look and listen! Can you see standing water? Can you hear it trickling?



4. Cottonwood Tree—This tree is a type of poplar that grows in moist areas. The Spanish word for poplar is "alamo" —named after the Alamo river where these trees were first seen by Spaniard explorers. When pioneers saw a cottonwood tree, they knew that water was near.

Let's talk about it:

Why isn't up on the ridge a good place for cottonwood trees to grow? What do we have down here that their habitat requires?



5. Sycamore Tree—The sycamore tree is a fast growing tree. It's easy to identify by its unique peeling bark that is mottled with greenish-white, gray, and brown. You should be able to find a few sycamores in the area by the seep.

Let's talk about it:

What do you think causes a young sycamore's bark to peel like this?

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|  | <p>6. Mockingbird—The Northern Mockingbird is the state bird of Texas. It likes to perch up high and sing. Its song is a medley of the songs of several other birds. An individual mockingbird can have as many as 25-30 songs in its repertory. Can you see any other birds today?</p> | <p>Let's talk about it:</p> <p>Find a place to sit and listen to the mockingbird's song. How often does it repeat? Try to imitate its song by whistling.</p> |
|  | <p>7. Bioswale— Rainwater from the landscape and parking lots flows into these above-ground channels in the land, called bioswales. They prevent erosion during heavy storms. Contaminants are filtered out by plant roots and soils and boulders slow the flow of the water down as it moves toward the Wet Prairie—the center of our cutting-edge hydrology system.</p> | <p>Let's talk about it:</p> <p>Why is rainwater management a good idea?</p> |
|  | <p>8. Locust Bridges—All of the bridges in the park are made from Black Locust wood. It is naturally very durable and won't rot in the ground. It is a sustainable U.S. alternative to tropical hardwoods whose harvest often contributes to the decline of South American rainforests.</p> | <p>Let's talk about it:</p> <p>Why do you think Black Locust wood would also be better to use rather than chemically treated wood?</p> |
|  | <p>9. Texas Bluebonnet—The Texas state flower! In the spring, the wildflower meadow is covered with bluebonnets. After they're done blooming, the field is mowed to encourage new growth for the next year. In early winter, look for their new, green growth in the wildflower meadow. You may also see Pink Evening Primrose, Indian Painbrush, and Engelmann's Daisy!</p> | <p>Let's talk about it:</p> <p>Have you ever read "Little House on the Prairie" by Laura Ingalls Wilder? What other books have you read that are set in the prairie?</p> |
|  | <p>10. The City—Notice how, even though the park is right next to busy North Central Expressway, the traffic sounds aren't as loud as usual? The noise is buffered to allow you to hear the birds and the wind through the trees and grasses.</p> | <p>Let's talk about it:</p> <p>What do you think is helping to absorb the traffic sounds?</p> |
|  | <p>BONUS! Wet Prairie— Water from all over the property eventually ends up here, where it slowly infiltrates into the cistern (an underground storage tank that can hold 250,000 gallons of water). We reuse 90% of our stormwater run-off. The grasses and sedges growing here adapt to both saturated and extremely dry conditions. Plants include Little Bluestem, Bushy Bluestem, Inland Sea Oats, and Cherokee Sedge.</p> | <p>Let's talk about it:</p> <p>Where do you think the rainwater run-off from the building and parking lots would go if we didn't have a wet prairie and cistern to keep it on our grounds?</p> |

Did you love your experience at the Native Texas Park? We encourage you to write a "Thank-you" letter to President and Mrs. Bush about your experience. Please send all correspondence to:

President and Mrs. Bush
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