



Beech Tree

Self-guided Interpretive Trail

Introduction

Welcome to the Beech Tree Trail at Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve. On this self-guided interpretive trail, you will get to know features of the mature forest and learn why it is important habitat for wildlife.

The trail is 0.5 miles long and will take approximately 30 minutes to walk. Please stay on the trail to avoid poison ivy and leave all plants and animals undisturbed. Return the brochure to the recycling box at the end if you do not wish to keep it. Remember to sign out when you leave Reinstein Woods!

This trail is dedicated in memory of Bruce Kershner. Bruce was a local environmentalist who spent many hours in Reinstein Woods studying the forest. He was passionate about protecting trees.

1. Islands in the suburbs?

Reinstein Woods is unique because of where it is located. Surrounded by houses, roads and a town park, this property is an “island” or oasis of habitat for wildlife in the middle of a developed suburban “desert.” Bruce Kershner called the area “Buffalo’s Backyard Wilderness,” referring to the proximity of this remnant of mature forest to the nearby urban area.

2. A forest by any other name...

So what is a “mature” or “old-growth” forest? These forests usually have large live trees, large standing dead trees (called “snags”) and large logs on the ground. The dominant tree species are long-lived, like hard maples and beeches (versus quick-growing but short-lived cottonwoods and soft maples). Mature forests typically have had little human disturbance such as logging.

Take a look around you. Can you spot any “snags”? Do you see any signs of human disturbance?

3. Stormy weather

The “surprise storm” of October 2006 caused much damage around western New York and in Reinstein Woods, too. Many maple and beech trees had not lost their leaves yet, and the branches broke under the weight of the heavy snow. DEC Operations staff cleared the trails and piled the branches off to the sides. These brush piles now make good habitat for wildlife and may protect some young trees from being eaten by deer.

4. How does your forest grow?

Mature trees have several unique features. "Senescent" or cracking bark first appears at the base of the tree and moves up the trunk as the tree ages. "Buttressed" roots stick out above the ground to support the large tree trunks. The trees also have "cauliflower crowns"—the lowest branches appear 40 to 80 feet above the ground and spread out at the top. Because mature trees are growing in a shady forest, they have to reach up high for sunlight, so the shape of the tree resembles a cauliflower plant.

Look at the large tree by the post. Can you observe the three mature forest features on this tree?

5. The main players

Reinstein Woods is located in the beech-maple forest region, and two dominant tree species are the American beech and sugar maple. Beeches have smooth light-gray bark and look like giant elephant legs. Sugar maples have darker gray bark that peels back from the trunk in long sections. Look for the American beech tree on the right and the sugar maple on the left side of the trail. Both species can live for 300 to 400 years!

6. Black gold

Dark, bumpy bark on the outside, reddish-colored wood on the inside...many black cherry trees grow within our mature forest. Black cherry trees are highly prized for furniture. However, these trees are even more valuable for wildlife. The small, dark-purple fruits which ripen in summer provide food for a variety of birds. As the trees die, they become the home of carpenter ants, a favorite food of woodpeckers.

Look for woodpecker holes in the black cherry trees along the trail. The larger the hole, the bigger the woodpecker who made it!

7. The supporting cast

In addition to the beech, maple and cherry trees, several other species can be found in the mature forest. Yellow birch and white ash are two common trees. Each has distinctive bark—the yellow birch (near the post) has coppery, peeling bark, and the white ash (tall tree across the trail) has ridged bark that looks like tire treads. These species are not as abundant as the maples and beeches and do not live as long.

The side trail on the left leads to a deer enclosure, an 8' tall fenced area which "excludes" or keeps out white-tailed deer. This enclosure was constructed in 2007 to protect the plants inside from the deer grazing. Take a look—do you see any small trees growing?

8. If a tree falls in the woods...

If you look to the right side of the trail, you will notice several large trees on the ground. When these tall trees fell, they opened up large gaps in the canopy. The gaps allow more sunlight to reach the forest floor, giving young trees the chance to grow quickly.

9. A fungus among us

Mature forests have many dead and dying trees, a great place for fungus to grow. The mushrooms that you see on the tree next to the trail are like the "flowers" of the fungus, producing spores (like "seeds") to grow the next generation. Some mushrooms "bloom" for only a short time, especially when it is damp, while others remain on trees year-round. Most of the fungus is actually what you don't see—a root-like structure under the bark that digests the dead tree.

10. Who goes there?

Several species of wildlife that live in Reinstein Woods are unusual in a suburban area. They are associated with the mature forest and prefer the old trees, tree cavities and fallen logs found here. Flying squirrels prefer the old tree cavities. If you are lucky, you might hear a pileated woodpecker tapping on a tree or see a barred owl fly by. Look under leaves for spotted salamanders.

11. Things that go bump in the woods

While much of the ground in Reinstein Woods is flat, this area of the woods has small hills and hollows. Referred to as “pit-and-mound topography,” the hills or mounds are actually decaying trees covered with fallen leaves. As they decompose, these trees will provide nutrients for future generations of trees to grow. The pits are formed when the roots are pulled out of the ground as a tree falls over and can also provide habitat for wildlife.

12. Champion of the woods

Older than the *Declaration of Independence*, our champion beech tree has been growing for more than 250 years. DEC confirmed it as the New York State champion American beech tree in 2009. It stands more than 120 feet tall, and the trunk is more than 11 feet around. While it lost some branches in the October storm, it still is a majestic presence in Reinstein Woods. You can get a better view of this giant from the platform.

13. From the past to the future

Turn around and gaze at the giant beech trees on each side of the trail. You are glimpsing into the past before European colonization, when the northeastern US was covered with mature forest from the Atlantic Coast to the Mississippi River. Thanks to the Reinstein family, this patch of “wilderness” has been preserved for future generations to enjoy.

Conclusion

This concludes the Beech Tree Self-Guided Interpretive Trail.

We hope you have enjoyed your walk around the Beech Tree Trail and will return to enjoy the changes each season brings. Follow the map to return to the parking lot and restrooms. Look for more mature beech and maple trees on your way. And, as Bruce Kershner would say, “May the forest be with you.”

Please stop by the Education Center for information on the schedule of nature walks and educational programs at Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve.

For more information, contact:

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