

# Live Oak Nature Trail

This 1,555-foot accessible nature trail winds through several communities, including prairie hammock, xeric hammock, pine flatwoods, and strand swamp. Keep an eye out for the gopher tortoises!



## 1 Entryway to the Forest

The natural areas protect historic native ecosystems and their biological diversity. They are also open to the public for passive recreation. How do we solve the problem of saving the land while providing facilities for public use? By carefully designing the parking lots and trails so that they have only minimal impact on the native ecosystems. This area was once covered with the nonnative invasive plant Brazilian pepper. The peppers were removed, the parking lot was installed, and native vegetation was planted along the edges.

## 2 A Shady Place

A hammock is a place of tall trees, lush ferns, and cool shade. Depending on the amount of moisture available, a hammock can be hydric (wet), mesic (moderately wet), or xeric (dry).

It is believed the word "hammock" comes from the Native American word *hammocka*, meaning "shady place." This prairie hammock is moderately wet and floods periodically. It has a canopy of cabbage palms with a sparse understory of wax myrtle, marlberry, and eastern poison ivy. The old cabbage palm fronds and dead fruit spikes are prime real estate for ferns, orchids and airplants.



Inserts: Eastern Poison Ivy and Marlberry

## 3 A Champion Digger

The gopher tortoise is found in areas with well-drained, sandy soils and an abundance of low-growing plants. It uses its strong front legs to dig a burrow up to 30 feet long. One tortoise may have several burrows scattered throughout the area. These cool underground tunnels shelter many other animals, including insects, snakes, lizards, and small mammals. The gopher tortoise is considered to be a key species because of this important role that it plays in relation to other animals.



## 4 A Plant With Teeth

The saw palmetto has rows of razor-sharp, curved spines that line the leaf stalks. Early settlers compared these spines to the teeth of a saw blade, thus giving the plant its name. Saw palmettos produce greenish-white flowers in the spring that attract bees, wasps, and flies. Saw palmetto honey is described as full-bodied, citrusy and herbal, with woody overtones. The flowers develop into black fruits that provide food for raccoons, opossums, and other wildlife.



## 5 Weaving a Wondrous Web of Silk

Many of the animals living in Delray Oaks are small and can easily be overlooked by visitors. The golden silk orbweaver is not one of those animals. The female is often found head downward in the center of a large web. Some of the webs span a six-foot space from one tree to another. As with most spiders, the male is smaller than the female and rarely reaches 1/4 inch in length. The golden silk orbweaver, along with the spinybacked orbweaver and orchard orbweaver also found here, are not poisonous to humans. Spiders are often feared and despised; however, their hearty appetites help control the insect population.



Resurrection Fern Bracken Fern

## 6 A Lush Carpet of Green

The ferns of Delray Oaks can be found at your feet and above your head. Bracken ferns and swamp ferns cover the ground. Shoestring, golden polypody, and resurrection ferns cling to the trunks of live oaks and cabbage palms. The ferns growing on trees are epiphytes or airplants. They grow above the ground and get their nutrients and water from the rain. The resurrection fern changes its appearance throughout the year. During the dry season (winter and spring), the fern appears to be brown and lifeless. In the wet season (summer and fall), the fronds become dark green. All ferns reproduce through the release of spores from tiny sacs on the undersides of their fronds.

## 7 No Soil - No Problem

The largest Florida native airplant, the giant wild pine, attaches itself to rough-barked trees. Although airplants appear to be parasitic, they only use trees as a place to grow. The giant wild pine belongs to the pineapple family. The feathery seeds of many bromeliads are carried by the wind. Other airplants found here include the ballmoss and Spanish moss.



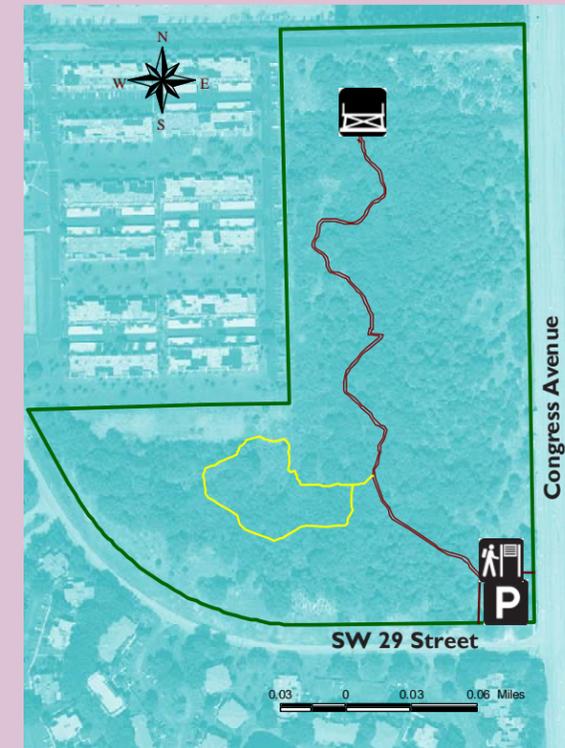
## 8 Working with Fire

This portion of Delray Oaks was prescribed burned to maintain the natural functions of the ecosystem. Controlled burning also reduces the likelihood of a wildfire adversely affecting surrounding residences. These burns are managed under carefully prescribed weather conditions such as temperature, humidity, wind speed, and wind direction. Although a burned area looks scorched immediately after a burn, the area quickly begins to regenerate with native vegetation such as gallberry and muscadine.



Gallberry Muscadine

# Delray Oaks Trail System



The Delray Oaks Natural Area is located west of Congress Avenue, roughly 1 mile south of Linton Boulevard, in the City of Delray Beach. This 25-acre natural area contains some of the best remaining examples of prairie and xeric (dry) hammock communities in southern Palm Beach County. It also contains small areas of pine flatwoods and strand swamp. Public use facilities include a parking area for ten cars and two buses, an accessible nature trail with an observation platform, a bicycle rack, a kiosk with educational exhibits, and a hiking trail. There are no restroom facilities or drinking water on the site.

- Parking
- Information
- Observation Platform
- Natural Area Boundary
- Live Oak Nature Trail 0.29 miles
- Beautyberry Hiking Trail 0.20 miles

## 9 The Sights and Sounds of Delray Oaks' Strand Swamp



This observation platform overlooks a strand swamp, which contains a long depression or channel. Standing water may be present in this channel for 200 to 300 days per year, with a maximum water depth of 10 to 30 inches. The strand swamp is full of life - all you have to do is sit quietly and keep your eyes and ears open. What's that rustling through the dead leaves on the ground? It could be an eastern gray squirrel or a green anole. See that flash of red among the tree tops? That is a male northern cardinal checking his territory. Listen closely and you may hear him call *wait wait cheer cheer cheer*. Did you spot a flash of silver among the green ferns? You caught a glimpse of the delicate, transparent wings of a great pondhawk. These dragonflies are mosquito-eating machines. They eat both the larvae young and the adults of several mosquito species.

# Delray Oaks Photo Album

Mammals	Reptiles	Birds	Insects and Arachnids	Plants
 Gray Fox	 Racer	 Red-bellied Woodpecker	 Zebra Butterfly	 Strangler Fig
 Eastern Gray Squirrel	 Green Anole	 Northern Mockingbird	 Eastern Pondhawk	 Pond Apple
 Eastern Cottontail	 Eastern Box Turtle	 Northern Cardinal	 Orchard Orbweaver	 American Beautyberry
 Virginia Opossum	 Southeastern Five-lined Skink	 Cooper's Hawk	 Silver Garden Spider	 Virginia Creeper

## Preserving Palm Beach County's Good Nature

Welcome to one of Palm Beach County's natural treasures! The Delray Oaks Natural Area preserves and protects two of South Florida's rapidly disappearing plant communities - prairie and xeric (dry) hammock. The shady hardwood forest has a canopy of live oak, cabbage palm, and strangler fig. Wild coffee, gallberry and several species of ferns are present in the understory. Pond apples grow in the wetter areas of the site. Slash pines also are present.

The natural area is a remnant of a small island of higher ground on the northern edge of the historic Yamato Marsh. After canals were dug just west of the site, the water level in the marsh dropped until the marsh ceased to exist. The County completed the purchase of the site in 1995. State Preservation 2000 matching funds in the amount of \$1,613,342 were provided by Florida Communities Trust for the acquisition of the site.

This 25-acre natural area is part of a system of natural areas, protected to maintain the diversity of biological communities and species in Palm Beach County. The natural areas are open to the public for educational use and passive recreational activities such as hiking, nature photography, and bird watching.



**Delray Oaks Natural Area is home to hundreds of plant and animal species. One of the more unusual inhabitants is Spanish moss. Spanish moss, also known as "old man's beard," is not a moss but an epiphyte (airplant). The soft, springy tendrils are perfect for lining bird nests and have been used by early settlers to stuff mattresses. Other epiphytes found in the natural area include the giant wild pine, ballmoss, and banded airplant.**

## Rules and Regulations

**Prohibited on the Site:**  
Smoking  
Hunting  
Alcoholic beverages  
Discharging firearms  
Pets or domestic animals  
Bicycles or motor vehicles  
Collecting plants or animals

Use only existing trails.  
This is a "no trash area."  
All items taken in must be taken out.

The natural area is open from sunrise to sunset, seven days a week, including holidays.

There are no toilets or drinking water at this site.

**In an emergency, call 911, or the Delray Beach Police Department at 561-243-7800.**



Connect with the Department of Environmental Resources Management and download our natural areas mobile map.



Palm Beach County  
Board of County Commissioners

In accordance with the provisions of ADA, this brochure may be requested in an alternate format.

Palm Beach County Department of Environmental Resources Management  
2300 N. Jog Road - Fourth Floor  
West Palm Beach, FL 33411-2743  
Phone: 561-233-2400  
www.pbcgov.com/em  
www.facebook.com/pbcem  
Revised July 2013



## Delray Oaks Natural Area Trail Guide

A Florida Communities Trust Preservation 2000 Project