

marshy areas with boardwalks. The path turns left just before reaching a metal gate and soon runs alongside the park entrance road. A short way up, pass a trail intersection on the left, and come out on the road that borders the farm area. Return to the parking lot by following the road on the right to the other side of the farm.

■ TO THE TRAILHEAD

From Chicago, head north on I-90/I-94. Follow I-94 as it separates from I-90. Continue on I-94 to Deerfield Road. Turn left (west) on Deerfield Road and proceed a half mile. At Riverwoods Road, turn right (north). Two miles ahead, turn left at the sign for the Edward L. Ryerson Conservation Area.

Public transportation: Ryerson is a 3.5-mile bike ride from both the Deerfield station on the Milwaukee District–North Metra Line and the Buffalo Grove station on the North Central Service Metra Line. See the Active Transportation Alliance’s “Chicagoland Bicycle Map” for good routes between Ryerson and these stations.

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Chicago Botanic Garden Hike

■ OVERVIEW

LENGTH: 2.7 miles

CONFIGURATION: Large loop with a few short loops attached

SCENERY: Islands, prairie, oak woodland, marsh, and acres of pristine gardens

EXPOSURE: Mostly exposed

SURFACE: Paved, gravel, wood chips

HIKING TIME: 1 hour

ACCESS: 8 a.m.–sunset, except December 25. Garden is free; parking is \$15 per car.

FACILITIES: Visitor center, cafe, restrooms, gift shop, library, ATM, wheelchairs, and telephones

MAPS: Pick up a map at the visitor center; USGS topo Highland Park, IL

SPECIAL COMMENTS: No pets allowed. Two different tram tours run seasonally. Tickets and information are available at the booth outside of the visitor center. Check out www.chicago-botanic.org for more information.

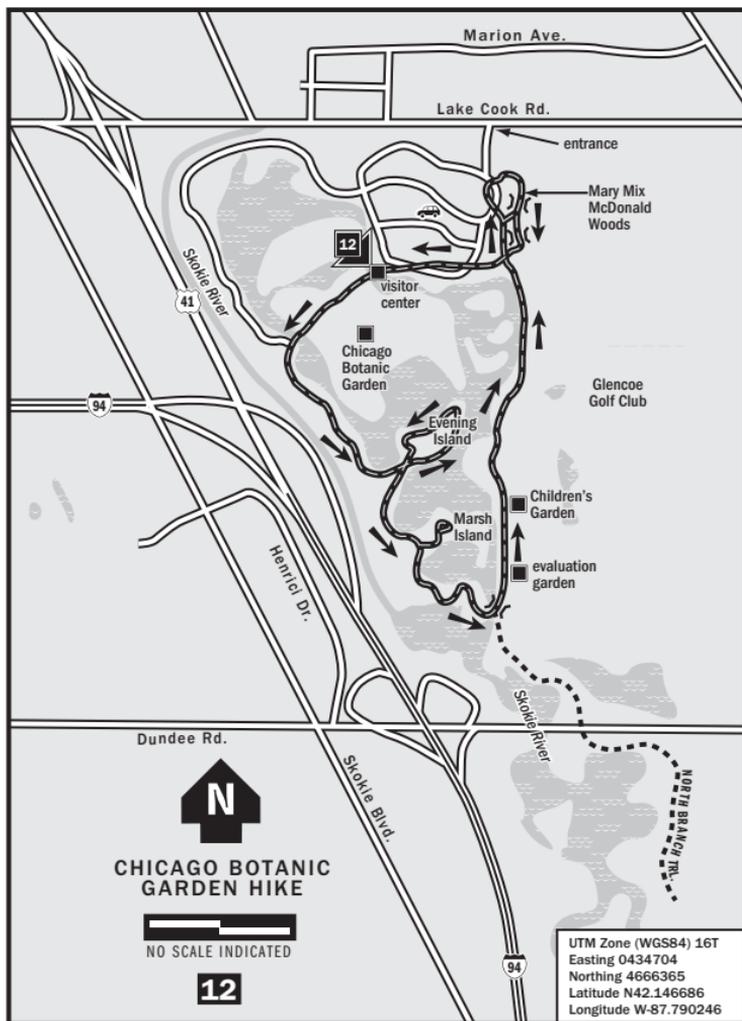
■ S N A P S H O T

If you love to see carefully selected flowers, trees, and bushes growing in perfectly landscaped environments, the Chicago Botanic Garden is a slice of heaven. While the interior gardens are justifiably the main attraction here, many visitors miss the additional gardens, the prairie and woodland, and the striking views that accompany a walk through the outer perimeter of the garden, highlighted in this hike.

■ U P C L O S E

Among the Botanic Garden's 305 acres of artfully landscaped grounds, there are 23 distinct gardens, including Japanese- and English-style gardens, rose and bulb gardens, fruit and vegetable gardens, and gardens specially designed for children and for wheelchair access. Along with this excess of gardens, there are attractive bridges, statues, fountains, and plenty of scenic spots situated among the nine islands and the surrounding shoreline. Owned by the Cook County Forest Preserve District and managed by the Chicago Horticultural Society, the gardens are just part of what goes on here. The Botanic Garden has programs in education and research and offers a number of special events and services, such as classes, plant sales, opportunities to consult master gardeners, concerts, and speakers.

From the visitor center, start the hike by heading straight across the North Lawn to the service road leading over the lake at the far end of the garden. On the other side of the bridge, pine trees grow on the left and buckeye trees grow on the right. Take either the service road or the narrow, paved path to the left. In the lake is Spider Island, thick with alders, birch, and serviceberry trees. On the right, the Skokie River runs along the bottom of a shallow ravine. Also on the right is a newly added brick wall and 1,600 new tree plantings intended to block noise and pollution from I-94. Extending from Spider Island to the serpentine-shaped bridge that leads to Evening Island is the Sensory Garden, which hosts plants and trees that produce an array of colors, sounds, fragrances, and textures.



Just ahead on the left, take the gravel trail to Evening Island, added to the botanic garden in 2002 at a cost of \$16 million. In gardening circles, the design of this 5-acre island is called the “new American” garden style and is inspired by landscapes such as the meadow and the Midwestern prairie. Climbing the hill in the center of the island, watch how the placement of trees nicely frames the views of the nearby shoreline and prairie. Near the

top of the hill, a circle of large stones provides a great place to relax. The square metal tower, called a carillon, contains 48 bronze bells that weigh between 24 pounds and 2.5 tons (check in at the visitor center for information on regular carillon concerts). The bridges on the north side of the island provide a connection with the main gardens and complete the outline of a section of the lake called the Great Basin.

Back on the paved road, pass a few burr-oak trees and several purple martin houses attached to poles as you head into the 15-acre prairie. Entering the prairie, take the gravel trail left, and stay left at the next couple of junctions before crossing a bridge for a quick tour of Marsh Island. Botanic Garden staff maintains that Marsh Island (actually a wet prairie) is the best location on the grounds for spotting water birds and songbirds. Coming off Marsh Island, stay left as you pass a section of hilly prairie on the right—the dry, rocky soil is the reason that the grass is shorter at the top of the hill compared to the sides and bottom. After the small hills, take your pick of following the paved road, the dirt path, or the paved path, all of which lead to the bridge. On the way to the bridge, you'll pass compass plants (tall yellow flowers) and more burr oaks.

The bridge divides the Botanic Garden lake on the left and the Skokie River on the right. On the other side of the bridge, turn left on the paved road and pass the plant-production area, which grows 420,000 plants annually. Next on the right is the Children's Garden, where kids can get involved in activities such as watering plants, digging in soil, and climbing through a plant maze. The garden on the left contains roses that are evaluated for qualities such as color, fragrance, novelty, and vigor. The next garden, featuring a big sundial surrounded by 7,000 herbaceous plants, also serves as an evaluation garden. Both of these evaluation gardens keep out deer by using solar-powered electric fencing that is turned on after hours.

After passing a stand of downy hawthorn trees next to the road, three islands come into view, each carefully landscaped and pruned in traditional Japanese styles. A low zigzag bridge connects the first and second islands. Off in the distance, between the second and third islands, a waterfall tumbles some 45 feet over granite

boulders. The inaccessible third island contains smaller trees that are intended to present the optical illusion that the island is far off in the distance.

Finish up the hike with a brief stroll through the Mary Mix McDonald Woods, the only location at the Botanic Garden where the soil is undisturbed. Enter the oak woodland on the right before the road curves to the left. Stay to the left on the path as you pass over a series of footbridges spanning intermittent streams and several boardwalks. Along this path there's a steady progression of signs identifying plants and animals of the area and describing the basic concepts of woodland restoration in northeastern Illinois. Because this trail crosses the park road, watch for traffic, especially on the weekends. In a number of spots you'll see that the Botanic Garden is engaged in a serious fencing campaign to keep deer out of the area. When finished with the hike through the McDonald Woods, continue along the paved road to the parking lots just ahead. Or if you wish to return to the visitor center or explore more of the interior gardens, follow the wood-chip path that runs parallel to the lake and take the service road left to the visitor center.

■ TO THE TRAILHEAD

Follow I-90/I-94 northwest, continuing on I-94 for 13.5 miles after I-90 splits off. At Exit 29, remain on the Edens Expressway (US 41); then take the next exit for Lake Cook Road. Turn right (east) and travel for a half mile to the Botanic Garden. Follow signs to the parking areas.

Public transportation: Save yourself the \$15 parking fee and take the Metra. The Union Pacific–North Metra Line stops within a mile of the Botanic Garden. On Sundays during the warmer months, take Metra to the Glencoe station, and then take the Garden Trolley to the Botanic Garden (for trains arriving/departing from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Glencoe station). You can also walk to the garden from the Braeside Metra station (head west for nearly 1 mile along Lake Cook Road to the garden entrance). From Davis Street, Glencoe, and Highland Park Metra stations, take bus 213 to the garden.

Bicycle: Three long bike trails run into or near the Botanic Garden. To the east is Green Bay Trail, to the west is the southern terminus of the Skokie Valley Bikeway, and coming from the south is the ever-popular North Branch Trail, which brings you right into the garden's grounds.

■ MORE FUN

At the southern edge of the Chicago Botanic Garden, visitors can connect with the 20.1-mile North Branch Trail. One of the great urban pathways of Chicagoland, the North Branch Trail runs through the Skokie Lagoons and along the North Branch of the Chicago River. To reach the trail from the botanic garden, head south on the service road on the east side of the lake. The path starts on the other side of Dundee Road.

