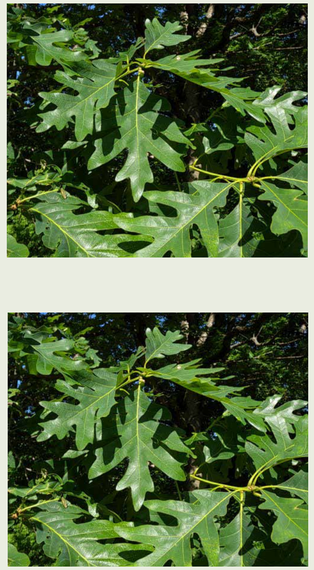
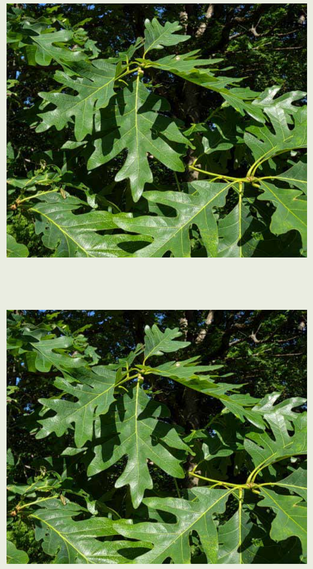
AUSTIN GARDENS WOODLAND HABITAT

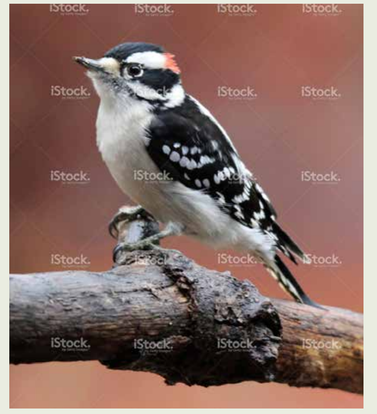
Listen to the woodlands. Hear the crunching leaves underfoot as you walk along this path in the brisk month of autumn. Enjoy the spring forest musical of birds or frogs against the backdrop of budding trees and wildflowers. The stillness in the winter through this snow covered woodland can be invigorating. There is nothing like a walk in the woods.









Deciduous Trees
Deciduous trees, that shed their leaves in the fall, are abundant in the Woodland habitat. Woodland biodiversity is affected by the trees we plant. Native trees provide an adequate food source for wildlife, including migratory birds. Decaying trees provide a food source and shelter for many woodland inhabitants such as salamanders, worms and insects.

Wildflowers
Native ephemeral wildflowers race against time each spring. They must sprout, grow, flower, fruit and seed in the early months of Spring before the tree leaves come out and block the sunlight. The flowers spend the rest of the year resting below the soil surface. These Spring ephemerals help feed insects and birds when little other food is available. A symbiotic relationship exists between insects that feed on these wildflowers while pollinating the flowers and dispersing the seeds.

Woodland Community
The woodland community is home to a variety of living organisms such as fungi, cicadas, wood frogs and migratory birds. Wood-eating insects and fungi turn decaying trees into humus, a dark, rich soil that replenishes this ecosystem. Migratory birds can be observed in this woodland area starting in late winter. Some make their home here, while others continue their journey.

PARK DISTRICT of OAK PARK
www.pdop.org

The Austin Family bequeathed the estate to the Park District of Oak Park on the condition that it remains a public park bearing the family name.
A Trust for Austin Gardens is held by the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation with the proceeds used for extraordinary maintenance and recreation activities.

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Woodland Area Management

Maintaining the balance of this woodland ecosystem requires thoughtful sustainable practices due to a drastic change in this woodland area since the European settlement. Historically, many oak trees had wide branches, allowing broad rays of sunlight to reach the woodland floor. The plant community in these woodlands consisted of a variety of blooming plants that tolerated fire and colored the landscape for almost nine months of the year. This ground layer of vegetation also prevented soil erosion and retained rain water.

Controlling Invasives

Many Illinois woodlands are being devastated by invasive plants that are taking over these habitats. Invasive plants out-compete native plants for resources and pollinators and alter the ecology of natural areas. Irradicating non- native and invasive plants from the woodlands is an important part of maintenance. Planting diverse, native plants encourages the balance of biodiversity needed for wildlife. The more diversity an area can support, the healthier the habitat is considered to be.

Prescribed Fires

All native plant communities of northeastern Illinois - wetland, woodland, savanna, and prairie - require regular fire to remain healthy. Historically these ecosystems burned due to anthropogenic (human caused) and natural (lightning) reasons. In the absence of fire, these communities lose their balance and become unhealthy. Coupled with the introduction of non-native plant species, native plant communities, along with the birds and butterflies that depend on them, are lost.
Many non-native species did not evolve with regular fire. As a result, prescribed fire is one tool for controlling these unwelcomed species. Prescribed fires recycle organic nutrients back to the soils, promote oak regeneration, stimulate the growth of native plants and control invasive weeds from growing.

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