

The Lake Wilderness Arboretum Forest Reserve

Many people think of the [Lake Wilderness Arboretum](#) (LWA) as only the cultivated gardens and meadow area readily accessible from the Arboretum's entrance off SE 248th or from the entrance leading down from the Lake Wilderness Lodge. As it turns out, this area represents only a small part of the Arboretum. As noted on our website, the Arboretum consists of cultivated gardens *and an "urban forest."* This "urban forest," formally known as the Lake Wilderness Arboretum Forest Reserve, comprises 26 acres of the Arboretum's 40 acre total and is found on the North side of the King County's Green to Cedar trail that intersects the Arboretum.



Lake Wilderness Arboretum
- 14 Acres of Gardens
- 26 Acres of Forest

The forest reserve consists primarily of even-aged (80-85 year-old) Douglas-firs. Dominant trees are about 17" in diameter and 100' tall although several larger specimens approach 35" in diameter and 120' in height. We have been unable to determine the age of these strikingly large specimens – maybe they are older than their compatriots or maybe they have received more sun and water in the past 80 years.

Although most of the conifers in the forest are Douglas fir, some western red cedar and western hemlock are present along with a couple of Pacific yews, which are somewhat uncommon around here. Open areas in the forest enable big leaf maples to spring up and the damp south east corner of the forest hosts several very tall black cottonwoods.

The understory of the forest has a wide variety of native plants including salal, short Oregon grape, sword fern, bracken fern, cascara, vine maple, ocean spray, baldhip rose, red huckleberry, creeping blackberry, and Indian plum. Although there is a large variety of plants in the understory, it is dominated by the salal which in places grows up to 6' tall. This is a fairly common occurrence in our damp, second growth western Washington coniferous forests. See our plant list ([Word/PDF](#)) for a list of plants in the Arboretum Forest.

Although the forest's beautiful conifers and other plants provide a beautiful green, natural environment, like many other urban forests, the Arboretum's forest is under stress. In addition to the impact of invasive plants from nearby urban backyards, the over-crowding of trees in the forest is impacting the health of individual trees. The density of the forest is over 200 trees per acre (TPA), whereas, a healthy forest of its age should be around 100 TPA or less. This over-stocked condition limits an individual tree's ability to grow stronger and increases the rate at which pathogens can spread. Selected logging (ecological thinning) might serve to improve the health of the forest, but the forest's location in the middle of an urban area, makes logging problematical. In the meantime, monitoring of the forest's health needs to be continued.

A [Forest Stewardship Plan](#) has been developed for the Arboretum's forest and continues to serve as a guide for caring for the forest.

Wildlife

In a sea of urban development, the Arboretum's forest, provides a 26-acre island of food and shelter for animals whose natural habitat in and around Maple Valley continues to shrink. The forest's most commonly seen inhabitant is the Douglas squirrel (sometimes referred to as a pine squirrel). This little, pointy-eared guy (it's actually hair you are seeing), can be seen (and

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heard) scampering up and down the forest's large Douglas firs. Large piles of fir cones at a tree's base indicate that one of these squirrels has been feeding there – getting seeds out of the tree's cones.

Although we may not often see other mammals in the forest reserve, they undoubtedly take advantage of this hideaway. For example - given the evidence of deer browsing in the Arboretum, they certainly frequent the forest if not permanently reside there. Other animals residing or visiting the forest likely include raccoons, possums, skunks (phew!), weasels, and rabbits. An unlikely permanent resident, a black bear, was once sighted visiting the forest.

Some birds can also be spotted in the forest, but the dearth of light penetrating the forest may inhibit some avian visitors. Nevertheless, woodpeckers surely work on some of the snags found in the forest and owls may seek refuge in those same snags.

Should you see any feathered or furred friend in the forest we would love to have your comments (and pictures) so that we can enrich our information about the forest's wildlife.

Garry Oak Woodland

Just east of the forest's east side and north of the Green-to-Cedar River Trail, is a small open area planted with Garry oaks. This drought-tolerant tree is the only oak native to the state of Washington. Before settlers arrived in western Washington, the Garry oak played an important role in indigenous people's lives. The understory of Garry oak woodlands was maintained by native Americans using controlled burning. This suppressed the growth of shrubby plants and promoted the growth of a wide variety of herbaceous plants that provided grazing and easy hunting for deer and elk. The bark of Garry oak was also used as a cure for tuberculosis. Some tribes used the acorns as food, but a lengthy tannin leeching process discouraged reliance on this food source. With the dwindling of western Washington prairies – an ecosystem that supported Garry oaks, many Garry oak woodlands have disappeared. The small area planted next to the Arboretum forest is an attempt to show Maple Valley residents a small example of a "woodland" and to provide a venue for learning more about our one and only native oak.

Hiking/Visiting the Forest

The Arboretum's forest is crisscrossed with several easy-to-traverse trails. The "Maple" trail circles the forest and other trails lead from this trail or the Green-to-Cedar River Trail, intersecting various portions of the forest. Visit our [website](#) for directions to the Arboretum and a [map](#) of the forest showing its trails.

On your next visit to the Arboretum, take time to walk through the forest. As you walk the forest's pathways - see how many different native plants you can identify (don't forget your [plant list](#)), look and listen for birds and animals. We hope you enjoy your walk through the forest and would enjoy your feedback.



Green-to-Cedar Trail Next to Forest