

Tales & Trails:

Magic of the Forest

Welcome fellow adventurer! You are about to embark on a magical journey through an enchanted forest. Discover plants and creatures, both common and uncommon! But remember, nature is ever changing, and signs may not lead you directly to what you seek. So, keep your eyes wide open! From big to small, don't forget to observe it all!

Explore the seasonal magic, as hidden plants and creatures invite you to return for more discoveries.

A photograph of a forest floor. A large, thick tree trunk is the central focus, covered in green moss and lichen. The bark is rough and textured. To the left of the tree, there are some small, red, fleshy-leaved plants growing from the forest floor. The background is a dense forest with many other trees and foliage, creating a sense of depth and a magical atmosphere.

Designated as a Natural Forest Area in 1994, this park has 1 of 7 lowland forests in Washington with patches of old-growth communities.

What makes this forest magical?

Along your adventure, you'll encounter both mature and old-growth forests. You will know the ancient areas by their multi-layered tree canopies, towering snags, abundant deadwood, and diverse microhabitats. They serve as living laboratories that illustrate how forests adapt to natural changes and form complex relationships over time.

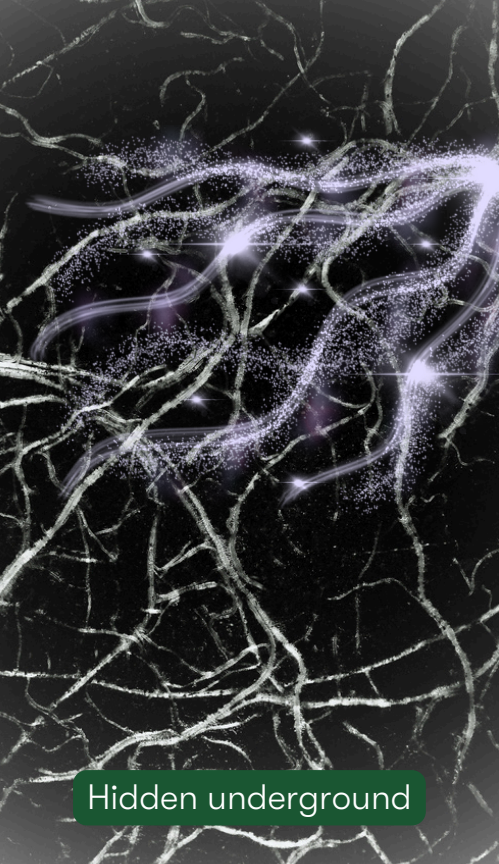
Ghost Plant

Monotropa uniflora

Oooo ooo! This ghostly white flowering plant has no chlorophyll, meaning it cannot make its own food. Instead, it steals sugars from the underground fungal network!



Flowers May-August



Fungal Network



Mycorrhizal Fungi

Shhh... the forest speaks. Beneath your feet, trees whisper through roots and mycorrhizal fungi, passing along water, nutrients, warnings, and wisdom in a silent, ancient language. Fungi receive sugars and fat from plants in exchange for nutrients like phosphorous and nitrogen. While most plants benefit symbiotically, some exploit these networks for their own gain.

Hidden underground



Gnome Plant

Hemitomes congestum

This fleshy-colored plant pops out of the ground for only a few months out of the year.

Like its cousin, the Ghost Plant, this plant lacks chlorophyll. It utilizes Devil's Tooth Fungus to siphon nutrients from nearby trees.



Flowers May-August

Hooker's Ground Cone

Kopsiopsis hookeri

What appears to be a flower is anything but ordinary. This crimson, leafless bloom lurks in the forest's shadows, surviving through parasitism by siphoning nutrients from the roots of nearby salal. Rare and elusive, it only emerges under the right conditions—spotting one is considered a stroke of forest luck.

Flowers April-July



Sugarstick

Allotropa virgata

Beware, Hansel and Gretel, this yummy, but grimly parasitic plant is not candy! Like other fantastical plants found in this enchanted forest, it feeds on fungi below the surface and may lay dormant for years before being seen again.

Flowers throughout
Summer



Flowers May-August

Spotted Coralroot

Corallorhiza maculata



Can you guess how this plant got its name? Yes, the roots of this plant look like coral! You may have also guessed from the lack of green leaves, that this too, is a parasitic plant! These types of plants thrive in the understory of forests where sunlight is limited. Just think of them as “pretty little vampires,” lurking in the shadows and sucking up nutrients provided by the forest’s fungal network.



Flowers May-July

Pinesap

Monotropa hypopitys

From the darkened forest floor, this amber-hued plant rises like a candle lit from below. Pinesap has no green of its own and no need for sunlight. Instead, it feeds through underground fungal magic, stealing from nearby trees. Rarely seen, it is said to bloom after it rains, its clusters glowing softly in the gloomy, shadowed underbelly of the forest.



Sword Fern



Polystichum munitum

Avast Ye! This fern was named for the shape of its sword-shaped leaflets. It is said that those who possess the fern's invisible seed, could then become invisible themselves. These magical seeds might also allow one to understand birds or find buried treasure! Alas, fern seeds are but mere myth. It is now understood that ferns reproduce via spores and not invisible seeds.

Year-round

Evergreen Huckleberry



Vaccinium ovatum

Once nearly endangered due to overharvesting in the mid-1900s, this enchanting plant has battled new trials, including the mysterious witches' broom—a fungal curse. Yet, a thriving population flourishes in Fort Townsend, casting a spell of resilience. Each year, both people and wildlife eagerly await the arrival of nutrient-rich berries.



Flowers: Spring-Summer
Berries: August-September



Fairy Slipper

Calypso bulbosa var. *occidentalis*

Fairy slippers are almost as rare as fairies themselves. This enchanting flower looks much like a tiny slipper. It is a very delicate plant. Once the flower is plucked, the plant is likely to die. It seems only fairies know the secret to removing the flower safely.

Flowers April-Early May



Flowers Late Spring to
Early Fall

Twinflower



Linnaea borealis

Seasonally, twinflowers become the belle of the forest. Their delicate bell-shaped blossoms, with their sweet fragrance, create a charming carpet on the forest floor. Large clusters of twinflowers often indicate an old, thriving woodland, reflecting the forest's endurance and ecological richness.



Pacific Trillium

Trillium ovatum

The trillium, a three-petaled flower, is an emblem of balance and harmony. It grows in mature forests, thriving in the balance of light and shadow. As an early bloomer, it supports pollinators and relies on ants for seed dispersal, promoting mutualistic relationships. By stabilizing soil, enriching forest nutrients, and thriving only in undisturbed areas, the trillium embodies the intricate balance of a healthy, thriving ecosystem.

Flowers Early Spring to
Early Summer

Pacific Rhododendron

Rhododendron macrophyllum



Cloaked in blooms of pink and lavender, the rhododendron commands the forest like a queen among shrubs. Yet beware: her beauty comes with a bewitching power. In ancient lore, the honey of her blooms was said to drive those who drank it to madness. Mysterious and regal, she thrives in the shaded understory sheltering the small and quiet.

Flowers April-May



Stinging Nettle

Urtica dioica L.



Initially, this plant seems to require ample "personal space." By nurturing a connection with it, the nettle may reveal itself as a true ally! Brewed into an earthy tea, it unveils a treasure trove of vitamins and health benefits. Its fibrous stem, too, holds secrets; it can become sturdy cordage or twined into thread and woven into cloth. In many cultures, nettles are a symbol of protection.

Harvest leaves: Spring

Harvest stem: Fall



Devil's Tooth

Hydnellum peckii

In certain folklore, this eerie fungus is believed to represent death and decay. Ironically, this mushroom does not breakdown dead plant material but instead lives symbiotically with living trees like Douglas fir. The “blood” is just sap and serves as an important food source for insects.

Fruiting Bodies Possible
in Fall; Uncommon



Witch's Butter

Dacrymyces and *Tremella* species

These jelly-like fungi have many folk stories associated with them. Some say that you can defend yourself against witchcraft by tossing witch's butter into a roaring fire! Others just like to use this edible mushroom for making candy. To each their own!

Year-round
Peak Season: Winter



Year-round

Artist's Bracket

Ganoderma applanatum



When its pale underside is touched, the Artist's Conk or Bracket responds by darkening, revealing a natural transformation. For centuries, artists have utilized this mushroom as a canvas, taking advantage of its color-changing ability. However, only those who possess the patience to learn the art of handling this delicate medium can truly achieve mastery.



Fairy Fingers



Clavaria fragilis

Appearing like tiny fingers reaching up from the earth, this fungus flourishes in clusters beneath coniferous trees, within mossy patches, or scattered across grassy fields. Fairy fingers play a vital role in the not-so-mystical process of breaking down dead plant matter, contributing to nature's enchanting cycle.

Peak Season: July-January

Slime Mold

From the Kingdom of Protista!

These strange-looking amoeba-like organisms seem to magically appear overnight. Many cultures have stories about this being the spew, spit, or spilled butter from elves, fairies, trolls, or witches. However, slime mold is a living organism (not slime, nor mold) that breaks down wood and leaf material.



Peak Season: Spring
and Fall



Year-round

Old Man's Beard

Usnea longissima

Like a wise old man, lichen [like-en] can predict the fate of a forest. Lichen requires clean air to survive. From water and nutrients to harmful toxins, lichen absorbs everything in the air. If lichen vanishes from the forest, it indicates a decline in the forest's health. When lichen is plentiful, take a deep breath and appreciate the fresh air and healthy forest.



Cat's Tail Moss

Isothecium stoloniferum

Trailing from tree limbs in soft green wisps, this moss resembles the flicking tails of cats curled high in the canopy. Some say these are the resting places of witches' familiars, silent sentinels cloaked in moss who keep quiet watch over the forest. Found in damp, clean-aired woodlands, its presence is a gentle enchantment, hinting at both health and mystery in the trees above.

Year-round

Glittering Wood-moss

Hylocomium splendens

Pause and let your fingers glide over the delicate, feathery fronds of the glittering wood-moss. It thrives in the cool, shaded corners of the forest, where it appears to glisten. During dry spells, it shrinks and shrivels to preserve moisture; yet, after a refreshing rain, it unfurls and glimmers once again.

Year-round



Western Redcedar

Thuja plicata

Also known as the Giant Arborvitae, or “Tree of Life,” these forest guardians can live for over 1000 years! They serve as a refuge and food source for wildlife, and their wood and bark are valued by both artisans and healers.

Year-round

They carry the wisdom of ages, reminding us of the magical bond we share with the natural world and beckoning us to preserve their legacy for future generations.

Revered across cultures, they symbolize strength, resilience, and the profound interconnectedness of all living things.



Year-round

Douglas Fir

Pseudotsuga menziesii

No, this tree is not adorned with fur or softness; instead, it stands as a bastion of strength, clad in a natural armor. It is as though the tree is gifted with a protective shield against the fierce embrace of forest fires. Additionally, it casts a spell of defense in the form of sticky sap to ward off the relentless beetles that burrow beneath its bark.



Year-round;
Uncommon

Witch's Broom



Phytoplasmas

Look high among the towering Douglas firs, and you may discover tangled clusters nestled within the branches. According to folklore, witches would rest here, weaving their spells among the evergreens to shield us from dark forces. In reality, however, these structures are phytoplasmas—botanical mutations caused by bacteria and insects—and can be observed on various plants.



Year-round



Nurse Log

Healers of the Forest

A fallen tree may seem lifeless, but it serves a crucial role in nature. Nurse logs offer enriched habitats for seeds, aiding their growth. As they decay, they release nutrients into the soil, retain moisture, and protect seedlings from diseases. Moreover, nurse logs help store carbon in the forest ecosystem.



Banana Slug



Ariolimax columbianus

The Pacific banana slug glides gracefully through the forest. Its enchanting slime not only aids its smooth journey but wards off predators with a bitter taste and numbing magic (anesthesia). As nature's recyclers, these slugs weave through the damp woods, leaving sparkling trails of wonder and enchantment.

Most Common: April-
October



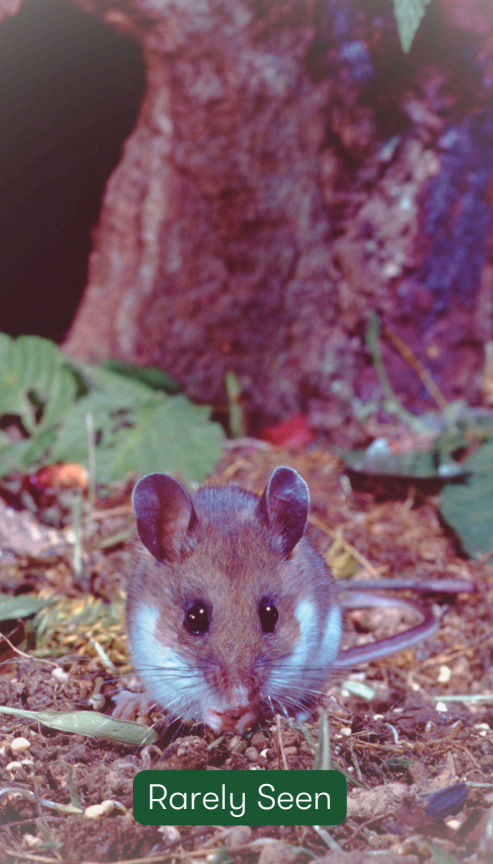
Possible Sightings:
Spring and Fall

Salamander



Ensatina eschscholtzii

There is no need for a constant water spell. Hidden beneath logs, they emerge only on misty nights and during breeding season. Males boast a magically puffed upper lip and a slender, elongated tail. When danger looms, a magical white toxin flows from their tails, wielded like a wand against threats.



Rarely Seen

Western Deer Mouse

Peromyscus sonoriensis



The western deer mouse scampers about the forest floor in the moonlight, dispersing seeds and spores. It navigates the dark using its keen senses to gather and store insects, seeds, fruits, and flowers for future feasts. In the forest's food chain, it sustains owls, snakes, and coyotes, making mice an essential part of the forest's magic.



Year-round

Common Raven



Corvus corax

Ravens are known for their remarkable problem-solving abilities and enchanting vocalizations. Their intelligence has woven them into the tapestry of myth and legend, where they are revered as symbols of wisdom or messengers across cultures. With a playful glint in their eyes and a mischievous spirit, ravens are also recognized as tricksters.



Pacific Wren



Troglodytes pacificus

Listen closely, and you may hear the Pacific wren's song. Though no bigger than a pinecone, the Pacific wren carries one of the most intricate songs that echos through the trees like a spell. Flitting low among roots and fallen logs, this secretive singer fills the forest with bright, enchanted music even in the darkest seasons.

Year-round

Most likely heard and not seen



Year-round

Douglas Squirrel

Tamiasciurus douglasii

Lively and loud, the Douglas squirrel is the self-appointed guardian of the woods.

Chattering from high branches and scolding all who trespass, it guards its cache of cones with dramatic flair. Don't be fooled by its size, this little sentinel keeps sharp eyes on all who enter its wooded domain.