

Beech-Magnolia Forest



The Beech-Magnolia Forest is described as a climax forest, what does that mean? A climax forest is a forest that over time has had minimal disturbances from man and fire thereby allowing it to evolve into its full potential. A forest goes through a process called succession, which in central Louisiana starts with grasses sprouting, followed by small shrubs appearing. Soon the grasses and shrubs are displaced by small trees such as pines, which are then supplanted by slower growing species such as oaks and hickories. Over time the forest matures and reaches its climax stage, which in the Arboretum is Beech-Magnolia, and very little change occurs in that habitat for generations.



Southern Magnolia

How do I know I am in a Beech-Magnolia forest?

Look for steep slopes, small streams and the easily recognized Southern Magnolia and American Beech trees. American Beech can be identified year round by smooth gray bark, and in the fall and winter by the copper colored leaves which remain on the tree until new green leaves emerge in the spring. The evergreen Southern Magnolias are easily recognized by large, dark green, waxy, hard leaves and showy, white, fragrant flowers.



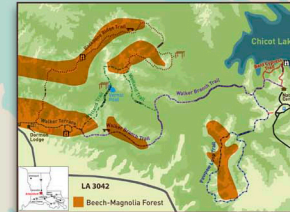
Wood Thrush



Southern Flying Squirrel



Beech Drops



LA 3042

Beech-Magnolia Forest

Where can I find good examples of a Beech-Magnolia Forest?

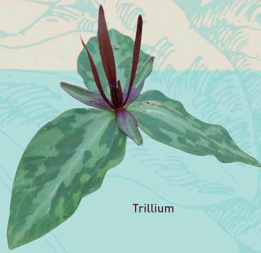
Since these are forests that occur in slopes, typical locations are in areas with a lot of varied topography. The arboretum's Beech-Magnolia Forest is on the southern edge of the range in Louisiana since the land tends to flatten out further south.

What is a Beech-Magnolia Forest?

This forest type is composed primarily of American Beech and Southern Magnolia interspersed with hardwood trees such as the White Oak, Sweetgum and Bitternut Hickory, giving it its other name, the Hardwood Slope Forest. Rising out of small stream floodplains, this forest type is typically found on slopes with rich silty loam and silty clay soils. Its moist location helps protect it from fire.



Green Dragon



Trillium

What are some of the understory plants in this habitat type?

Because of the heavy shade of the Beech-Magnolia Forest, there are many understory plants in this habitat including ferns, May-apple, violets, Jack-in-the-pulpit, trillium, Indian Pipes and orchids. Trillium, sometimes seen as the herald of spring, is a small wildflower with three leaves whorled around a stem. Beech Drops, another interesting plant, is parasitic and found on the roots of beech trees but does not harm the host tree because it is so short-lived.



Pileated Woodpecker



Hooded Warbler



Spicebush Swallowtail



Southern Copperhead

What are some of the animals found in this habitat type?

The wide variety of plants and trees in the Beech-Magnolia Forest support a high diversity of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians such as the Broad-headed Skink, Gray Treefrog, Hooded Warbler and the Southern Flying Squirrel. It is the perfect setting for flying squirrels due to the abundance of food from the oaks, hickories and beeches, and hollow trees for nesting. Another animal seen sometimes in this area is the Southern Copperhead, one of Louisiana's venomous snakes.



Gray Treefrog