Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary

What Will I Experience at the Garden?
A Social Narrative for Individuals, Families, and Groups
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Welcome!
I am going to Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary. The Garden is outside, and it is full of trees, flowers, and other plants from all over Minnesota and the United States. Sometimes I might see and hear animals, like birds, squirrels, frogs, and insects who live in the Garden.

The Garden is over 100 years old. The Garden’s trails cover 2/3 of a mile, but the Garden can seem large when I am inside of it because it has so many trees and plants.
Entering the Garden
To get to the Garden, I will walk down the steps from the parking lot to the Front Entrance Gate. I will see a metal gate with a sign above it that says, “Let Nature Be Your Teacher.”
Garden Rules

I will read the sign on the front entrance gate that lists the rules of the Garden. The rules are there to keep the people, plants, and animals in the Garden safe.

There is also a fence that goes all the way around the Garden. The fence prevents large animals, like deer, from coming into the Garden and stepping on or eating the plants.
I will open the front entrance gate and walk into the Garden. I will remember to stay on the trails, which are covered in soft woodchips. Some parts of the trails are hilly and other parts are flat.

If I or someone with me has a stroller, we can bring it into the Garden. If I have a bike with me, I will leave it at a bike rack outside of the Garden. I also can’t bring any pets into the Garden, because they can scare the animals that live in the Garden. If I have a service animal, I can bring it into the Garden.
Exploring the Garden

Now I can explore the Garden. If I turn to the left, I will see a map of the Garden. I can look at the map to find out what part of the Garden I want to visit. I can also read the signs about what is happening at the Garden right now. I will remember to stay on the path when I am in the Garden.

Map of Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden
Some parts of the Garden are in the shade, and other parts are in the sun. On sunny days in the summer, the Garden can be very hot. On cloudy days, the Garden can be cold and rainy, or it can be mild.

I might see or hear other people right away at the Garden, or I might not see or hear any other visitors.
Before I visit the Garden, I might want to check the weather forecast. The forecast will help me know if I should bring a jacket, hat, rain boots, umbrella, sunscreen, or other weather-appropriate clothing. I might want to wear shoes that are comfortable for walking. If the trails are wet, my shoes might get a little dirty.
When I am exploring the Garden, I can smell different flowers, look at the trees, and I can touch plants gently. I will leave all seeds, sticks, leaves, and other natural artifacts inside the Garden so that the plants can grow, animals can find food, and other visitors can enjoy the Garden.
The Visitor Shelter
If I go past the map and down the hill, I will see a small structure that looks like a house. This is the Martha Crone Visitor Shelter.
At the Visitor Shelter, I can read a book, do a craft, touch different objects related to nature, and learn more information about the Garden.

The Visitor Shelter is usually cool during the summer time. In the spring and fall, there might be a fire in the Visitor Shelter’s fireplace. This makes the Garden smell like a campfire. There is also a drinking fountain outside the Visitor Shelter.
I will probably meet a friendly Volunteer and a Staff Person at the Visitor Shelter. The staff at the Garden are called “Naturalists.” They help people learn about nature.

I can sit on a bench outside the Visitor Shelter or go inside to look at books, ask questions, or do a craft. I might ask a question like, “What kinds of plants or animals can I see at the Garden today?”
Sometimes the Visitor Shelter is crowded and loud. Sometimes the Visitor Shelter is quiet and not so crowded. If I want a quiet space, I can ask the Volunteer or Naturalist where to go.

I can feel objects on the Touch and See table when I am inside the Shelter.
I can borrow a pair of binoculars or a field guide to bring with me on my walk through the Garden. I can also ask for a Calming Backpack if I need a fidget or other calming materials, or I can check out an Adventure Backpack for fun things to do (like scavenger hunts) while I am at the Garden.

I will return anything I borrowed to the Visitor Shelter before I leave the Garden.
What to Expect on the Paths
When I am ready to leave the Visitor Shelter, I can walk around the rest of the Garden. If I want to touch something, I will touch gently so that the leaves, flowers, and branches stay on the plant or tree.

I can smell plants if I want to – some plants might have a strong smell, and some might not have a smell at all.
I might need to walk up or down a hill while I am exploring the Garden. Sometimes the paths are dry, and sometimes they are muddy or slippery if it has just rained. If I walk on the boardwalk (pictured below), the surface might be slippery.

I will be aware of roots or rocks that might be sticking out of parts of the paths.
There are no speed limits at the Wildflower Garden. However, I want to stay on the path to protect the wildlife. I also want to remain respectful of visitors who are on the paths and enjoying the Garden. Remember that loud, fast-moving feet may startle animals causing them to run and hide. If my feet are moving fast, I also might not see a root or rock in the path in front of me.
When I am exploring the Garden, I might see wooden posts with numbers on them. The numbers correspond with plants listed in the Eloise Butler Guidebook. I can ask to borrow the Eloise Butler Guidebook at the Visitor Shelter so that I can learn more about plants while I am at the Garden.
If I am with a group, I will stay with them when I am walking on the trails so that I don’t get lost. If I can’t find my group, I can ask a Naturalist or a volunteer. The naturalists wear blue t-shirts, and the volunteers wear nametags. I will not go out of the gate if I am not with my group.

If I meet a Naturalist on the trail, I can ask them questions about the Garden. They might ask to show me something interesting about a nearby plant or animal. I might ask a question like, “What kind of insect is this?”
Animals in the Garden
When I visit the Garden, I might hear birds singing, insects buzzing, or a gardener using tools. I can use my inside and outside voices at the Garden. If I want to see or hear animals (like squirrels, birds, or frogs), I will use my inside voice.

I might need to be patient to see an animal. If I see an animal, I will give it space, because I am in its home.
I might see insects (like mosquitos) flying around the Garden, especially in the middle of the summer. I might hear them buzzing.

I might also see bees in the Garden. I will remember that the bees want to visit the flowers, and they will probably ignore us. I can watch the bees, but I don’t want to touch them.

I might also see spiders and snakes in the Garden, and I will remember that they do not want to hurt me. They are more scared of me than I am of them! If I see a spider or snake, I can watch it to see what it is doing.
Most of the time, the Garden is fairly quiet. I might hear sounds from other visitors, and sometimes there are groups of kids visiting on field trips. If I want to know when we can come when the Garden is quiet, I can call the Visitor Shelter at 612-370-4903.
Bathrooms and Drinking Fountains

The bathrooms are located next to the front entrance gate in a small wooden structure. I might see them right away when I enter the Garden. The bathrooms at the Garden might be different from other bathrooms I have visited before, because the Garden’s bathrooms are like outhouses. The bathrooms might have a smell.

If I am on a walk in the Garden and realize that I need to use the bathroom, it will take me at least 5 minutes to get to the bathrooms. There might be a line for the bathroom, so I might need to wait a few minutes.
The bathrooms are single stalls with a door latch. The bathroom on the left has three toilet seats. The bathroom on the right has two toilet seats and urinal. I can choose the bathroom I am most comfortable with. If I need my caregiver to help me, they can go into the bathroom with me. I will not need to flush a toilet, but I will use a sink to wash my hands with soap. After I wash my hands, I can leave the bathroom.
There is also a drinking fountain outside the bathroom. If I am thirsty, I can get a drink of water from the drinking fountain. There are two other drinking fountains in the Garden – one is on the way into the Visitor Shelter, and the other is in the prairie near a large oak tree and two benches.
Across from the bathrooms there is a small shed. This building is just for the Garden’s staff, so I will not need to go into this building.
Leaving the Garden

If I need a break or want to leave, I can tell someone with me. If I am by myself, I can stay for as long or as short as I want to.

I might walk past the back gate, which is the only other way to get into or leave the Garden. Outside of the back gate is a path that leads into the rest of Theodore Wirth Park.
If I borrowed an Adventure Backpack or Calming Backpack, I will return it to the Visitor Shelter before I leave.

I hope I can come back to the Garden soon and see more plants and animals! The Garden changes all the time, so it is a good place to come back and see how the plants and animals change.
Frequently Asked Questions:

How Should I Prepare to Visit the Garden?
Before I visit the Garden, I might want to check the weather forecast so that I know what to wear. I might also want to bring a snack, because there are no places to purchase food at the Garden. I will bring a snack if I think I might be hungry. If I want to eat my snack, I can find a bench to sit on. I will remember to throw away any trash in a trash can. I will not give any of my snack to the animals, because my food might not be healthy for them.
Programs and Activities at the Garden

The Garden offers programs and activities for kids, adults, and families - if I want to go to a program when I visit the Garden, I can look at the program calendar under the “Activities and Amenities” section here: https://www.minneapolisparks.org/parks__destinations/gardens__bird_sanctuaries/eloise_butler_wildflower_garden_and_bird_sanctuary/. Programs are open to everyone, and most programs are free.
If I think that I will need some extra support while I am at a program, I (or a caregiver) can make a request through the Therapeutic Recreation department here: https://www.minneapolisparks.org/activities__events/therapeutic_recreation/.

If I would like an American Sign Language or other language interpreter, I will call the Visitor Shelter at 612-370-4903. The Garden’s staff are happy to help coordinate interpretation services.
Getting to the Garden
I can walk, drive, bike, take the bus, or use another form of transportation to get to the Garden.

If I or another person in my group drives to the Garden, we will park in the Parking Lot located off of Theodore Wirth Parkway. We will need to pay for parking at the parking meter. We can do this with a credit card, coins, or on the “ParkMpls” App. The parking lot costs $1/hour or $4/day.

I can also park at the Wirth Beach parking lot and walk for about 10 minutes to get to the back gate of the Garden. I do not need to pay for parking at the Wirth Beach parking lot.
If I bike to the Garden, I can lock up my bike at a bike rack located outside the Garden.

I can also take the bus to the Garden. Route 9 drops off passengers at the corner of Wayzata Boulevard and Theodore Wirth Parkway, and then I can walk to the Garden.
ADA Accessibility Resources

The Garden’s paths are hilly, narrow, and covered with woodchips. If I want to know about other places in Minneapolis that provide a similar experience to the Garden but are flatter or have paved paths, or if I have more questions about the trails at the Garden, I can call the Visitor Shelter at 612-370-4903.

If I would like an ASL interpreter, I can also call the Visitor Shelter at 612-370-4903, and staff will be happy to coordinate these services. Staff prefer at least two weeks notice to schedule an ASL interpreter but can provide one with as little as 72 hours notice.