



BELLEFONTAINE PARK AND ARBORETUM

Located at the intersection of Mississippi Highways 9 and 404 in the Historical Hamlet of Bellefontaine, Webster County, Mississippi, is a beautiful green space of a little over two acres.

The mission of the Bellefontaine Park and Arboretum is to exhibit, preserve, and protect the trees and other fauna on the property, while sharing the history of Bellefontaine and providing educational, cultural, and recreational opportunities for both children and adults.

The property boasts many trees, shrubs, and vines, some of which are identified by mounted plaques. In addition, there are three artesian springs on the property, two of which continue to run today.

Thanks to the generosity of the James Ethel and Ester Anglin Nail family, the Bellefontaine community has a rare gem in its midst. In 2025, the Nail family donated the house and a little over two acres to the Bellefontaine Belle Society to be used as a park and preserve for trees and other fauna. In 1960 James and Ester Nail purchased the house and one acre lot, along with other acreage, and moved to the Bellefontaine community with their children, Bert, Cloyce, and Verla. Mr. Nail was the County Agent for Webster County for many years. One of his specialties was grafting trees, particularly pecan trees. Most years Mr. Nail would graft around 5,000 trees, many of which grow on this property, as well as throughout Webster County. Mr. Nail left a hand-drawn map of the trees with a legend which has been instrumental in identifying the trees. In 1990 the Nails purchased the adjoining one acre+ lot from the Barron family.

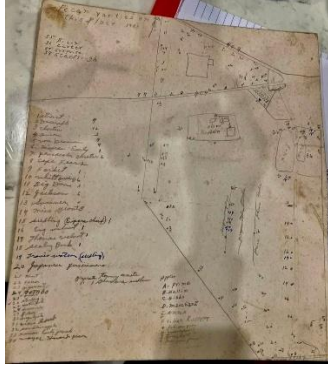
Much work has been done by Bellefontaine Belle volunteers to clean up the property since the 2025 donation. Work has begun to convert a stand-alone carport to a pavilion. A beautiful wooden bridge has been built across the ditch to connect the two parcels of the property, and benches and picnic tables have been donated. A new sign for the Historical Hamlet of Bellefontaine has been erected on the property. Some work has begun on the house (a portion of which is believed to date back to 1895), but it is not yet open for use. Future plans include providing a walking trail, a butterfly garden, and a water feature with the artesian springs.



Bellefontaine Park Fauna

Trees:

1. **American Beech** (*Fagus grandifolia*). American Beech develops a dense canopy and provides golden bronze fall color. It features simple leaves that are 3-6” long with sharp, incurved teeth on the margins. It yields edible, hard, brown beechnuts that are ½-1” in diameter. It compensates for its slow growth with longevity. It retains its smooth bark as it ages. This beech grows in an oval shape and needs plenty of space. At maturity it is 50’-70’. Beechnuts are eaten by birds and mammals, serving as an important food for chipmunks and squirrels. <https://shop.arborday.org/treeguide/170>
2. **American Holly** (*Ilex opaca*). American Holly has leathery leaves that are 2-4” long and retain their green color year-round. They are sharply tipped on the margins. The holly produces red, berry-like fruit that is popular with a variety of birds (but somewhat toxic for humans). It grows in a pyramid shape and should be planted in multiples to allow for cross-pollination to produce red berries. At maturity, the tree is 15’-30’. This tree provides cover and food for birds. The berries are an excellent food source for wildlife including cedar waxwings, mockingbirds, robins, squirrels, and other small mammals. <https://shop.arborday.org/treeguide/1915>
3. **Baldcypress** (*Taxodium distichum*). Baldcypress is a deciduous conifer with short needles arranged in pairs along slender branchlets. Its coloring ranges from yellow green in spring to soft green in summer to reddish or orangish brown in autumn. The baldcypress yields cones that appear as little globes approximately 1” in length that contain triangular seeds and are attractive to wildlife. It grows in a pyramid shape. It reaches a height of 50’-70’ feet at maturity. <https://shop.arborday.org/treeguide/985>



4. **Black Cherry** (*Prunus serotina*). Black Cherry has abundant spring blooms followed by dark red fruit that changes to black from August through October. Its shiny leaves have serrated edges with a long pointed tip. This tree is perhaps the largest and most important native cherry. Its wood is used for furniture and other woodworking, and wild cherry syrup used in cough medicine is obtained from its bark. It attracts birds and butterflies, and is a larval host to various butterflies and moths.

5. **Cherry Laurel** (*Prunus laurocerasus*). Cherry Laurel is an evergreen tree growing 16-49' tall. It has dark green, leathery, shiny leaves with a finely serrated margin. The cherry laurel produces flower buds in early spring which open in early summer. It produces a small cherry fruit which turns black when ripe in early fall. The fruit is astringent, but edible. It provides food and shelter for local Mississippi wildlife. It is a key host plant for Coral Hairstreak, Re-spotted Purple, Spring Azures, and Eastern Tiger Swallowtail butterflies. Early spring blooms provide pollen and nectar for bees. <https://houstonaudubon.org/conservation/bfc/nativeplants/gallery/cherry-laurel.html>

6. **Cherokee Princess Dogwood** (*Cornus florida* "Cherokee Princess"). This Dogwood is known for its abundant, large, pure-white spring blooms before its leaves fully emerge. It typically grows to 15-30' tall and wide. During the fall, its leaves become red and purple. In the winter, its bright red, berry-like drupes attract local songbirds. Dogwoods were recently planted by the newly erected Welcome to Bellefontaine "A Historical Hamlet" sign at the front of the park by the intersection of Highways 9 and 404.

7. **Chinese Pistache** (*Pistacia chinensis*). Chinese Pistache provides good fall color, with leaves turning beautiful shades of orange and red. It produces greenish flowers in April and May, but they are not showy. It provides small, round (1/4' diameter)

orange to red drupes that ripen in October. It grows in an ovel, rounded, spreading shape. It is known as the ‘Ugly Duckling” of the tree world, as it starts out as an unattractive and misshapen young tree that grows into a magnificent specimen tree. <https://shop.arborday.org/treeguide/1088>

8. **Desirable Pecan** – The Desirable pecan tree was developed from the Stuart pecan. It produces large well-filled pecans nuts year after year. The shell is medium to thick, but it is soft and very easy to crack.

9. **Dunstan American Chestnut** – Dunstan American Chestnut is a hybrid cross between the American and Chinese chestnut developed by Dr. Robert Dunstan. It is fast-growing and begins producing fruit in just 3 to 5 years. It can reach heights of 40’-60’. This chestnut produces large, sweet, edible chestnuts that drop in the fall. These must be cross-pollinated to get nuts. Ideally, plant three or more. This chestnut is known as the ultimate “food plot” tree, as the nuts are a big draw for deer, turkeys, and other wildlife.

10. **Eastern Black Walnut** (*Juglans nigra*). Eastern Black Walnut is a deciduous tree with wood that has a deep brown color. It is a coveted and expensive hardwood often used for fine veneers. It grows 100-130’ tall. The bark is grey-black which is deeply furrowed into thin ridges. Its fruit (nut) production can occur irregularly with some years producing greater crops than in other years. Its nuts are eaten by birds, white tailed deer, and eastern fox squirrels. Black walnuts are shelled commercially in the United States. However, shelling the nuts by hand is very difficult, as they are too tough and too large to be opened with a standard nutcracker.

11. **Eastern Redbud** (*Cercis canadensis*). One of the earliest signs of color in the spring, the redbud bursts into bloom with rosy, pink flowers in April. Eastern Redbud can begin flowering as early as 4 years. It grows in a rounded, vase shape. These early blossoms draw in nectar-seeking insects, including several species of early-season butterflies. Northern bobwhite and a few songbirds will eat the seeds. It can be used for nesting sites and nesting materials and provides shelter for birds and mammals. <https://shop.arborday.org/treeguide/384>

12. **Live Oak** (*Quercus virginiana*). Live Oak grows rapidly when young and can live for centuries. It produces green acorns, approximately ¾’ in length, which turn dark brown at maturity. On drier sites, it assumes a dwarf form. <https://shop.arborday.org/treeguide/992>

13. **Native Pecan** – Wild, native pecans have greater genetic diversity, so the nuts vary widely in size and shape. They generally have thicker shells. The word “pecan” is of Algonquin origin, used by Native Americans to describe all nuts requiring a stone to crack. Long before European settlements, native tribes relied on these nuts as a major food source and trade commodity. The pecan is the only major tree nut that grows naturally in North America.

14. **Owens Pecan** (*Carya illinoensis*). Owens Pecan is disease resistant and is a reliable performer in humid southern climates. It produces large, thick-shelled nuts that are well-filled. It is scab-resistant and has done well throughout Mississippi. <https://extension.msstate.edu/publications/fruit-and-nut-review-pecans-the-home-landscape>

15. **Pensacola Cluster Pecan** – E. W. Moring of Pensacola, Florida, discovered and introduced the Pensacola Cluster Pecan in the late 1950’s. The seedling variety was formally introduced in 1960.

16. **Pin Oak** (*Quercus palustris*). Pin Oaks provide great fall colors, with leaves turning shades of scarlet and bronze. It is a medium-sized deciduous tree with glossy, dark green leaves that are 3”-6” long with 5 lobes (but sometimes 7-9) separated by very deep sinuses. Its acorns are nearly round and ½’ long with a thin, saucer-like cap made of small, tight scales. It grows in a pyramid shape and provides dense shade. Pin Oaks grow to a height of 60’-70’. <https://shop.arborday.org/treeguide/1003>

17. **Red Mulberry** (*Morus rubra*). The Mulberry is fast-growing and is known for its sweet, edible, blackberry-like fruits that ripen from red to deep purple-black. It is a valuable wildlife food source. The ripe fruit is safe, but the milky sap from other parts can be mildly toxic. The fruit can be eaten fresh or made into jams, jellies, and wine. The Red Mulberry is a good shade tree. Its wood is used for fence posts and other items.

18. **Red Oak** (*Quercus rubra*). Red Oak has been called “one of the handsomest, cleanest, and stateliest trees in North America” by naturalist Joseph S. Illick. It is widely considered a national treasure. It boasts brilliant fall color and has great value to wildlife. Blue jays, wild turkeys, squirrels, small rodents, whitetail deer, raccoons, and black bears find the acorns to be one of their favorite foods. Lumbermen value the red oak. This tree grows to a height of 60’-75’.
<https://shop.arborday.org/treeguide/345>



19. **Sand Pear (or Acorn Pear)** – The Sand Pear tree produces crisp, juicy fruit with a texture similar to an apple, with the juiciness of a pear. They can be eaten raw or used in cooking and preserves. It is also known as Asian pear, and is an old-fashioned, Southern heirloom fruit. This tree was first introduced to the United States in the early 1800's.

20. **Sassafras** (*Sassafras albidum*). Sassafras is native to eastern North America and has unique aromatic leaves and vibrant fall colors. It was historically used by indigenous peoples for teas and remedies. Sassafras is famous as the original flavoring for root beer. Its dried leaves (called filé) are still used as a seasoning, particularly in Louisiana Creole cuisine. Today the tea is rarely consumed because it contains safrole, a compound the FDA considers a potential health risk.

21. **Southern Catalpa** (*Catalpa bignonioides*). Southern Catalpa has a short trunk with a broad, rounded crown of spreading branches, large heart-shaped leaves, and large clusters of showy white flowers. It produces a long, beanlike fruit, and reaches 25'-40' in height at maturity. Southern catalpa worms are the larval stage of the catalpa sphinx moth and are highly prized by fishermen. These caterpillars feed exclusively on the leaves of the catalpa tree. While these worms can strip a large catalpa tree entirely in a few weeks, they typically recover the following year.

22. **Southern Magnolia** (*Magnolia grandiflora*). Southern Magnolia produces creamy white flowers, sometimes up to 12' in diameter, and has a rich fragrance. It blooms May through June, with some blossoms opening throughout the summer months. This magnolia is evergreen, keeping most of its leaves year-round, although some do

shed. It produces a fruit pod that is 3-8” long, which is eaten by squirrels, rabbits, and birds, including wild turkey. Magnolias are intertwined with the history of the south. The name “magnolia” honors a French botanist, Pierre Magnol, who admired the tree so much that he transplanted it to Europe 300 years ago.

<https://shop.arborday.org/treeguide/333>

23. **Southern Sugar Maple** (*Acer floridanum*). Southern Sugar Maple is a deciduous tree in the soapberry family. It is a medium-sized tree with a light gray bark. It is used as a shade tree, and birds and squirrels use it as a nesting place and eat its seeds. This tree can grow to 50’-60’ and sometimes more. Its leaves turn to shades of red, orange, and yellow in the fall. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acer_floridanum

24. **Stuart Pecan** – The Stuart Pecan is one of the most widely planted pecan trees in the United States. It produces medium-thick shell nuts that are relatively easy to crack. The trees can reach a mature height of 70’-100’. It typically takes 8 to 10 years to start producing fruit. This tree originated from Pascagoula, Mississippi, in 1874.

25. **Sweet Gum** (*Liquidambar styraciflua*). Sweetgum is a valuable forest tree in the southeastern United States. It grows in a pyramid shape, reaching a height of 60’-75’ at maturity. It has five-pointed star-shaped leaves. In the fall, its leaves turn to brilliant shades of yellow, orange, red, and purple. One of its most distinctive features is the sweetgum ball. These are the fallen, opened fruits that are plentiful under the tree. The Sweetgum is one of the most important commercial hardwoods in the Southeastern United States. Sweetgum is highly valuable for wildlife. Its spiky seed balls provide a crucial winter food source for birds and small mammals. Its foliage is a major larval host for beautiful moths, including the green Luna moth. This tree also provides excellent cover and nesting sites for many songbirds.

26. **Tennyson Pear** – This pear tree came from the John Tennyson place in Choctaw County, Mississippi, on a hill about as tall as Little Mountain. It may have come from Doctor Ruff, who had a lot of fruit trees.

27. **Thomas Black Walnut** (*Juglans nigra* “Thomas”). The Thomas Black Walnut is a cultivated variety (cultivar) of the eastern black walnut which is native to North America. It is a deciduous tree which grows to 65’ tall. It produces spring flowers followed by large, thin-shelled, easy-to-crack nuts. It can be used in butterfly, edible, native, and nighttime gardens. This tree is a Larval host for Banded

Hairstreak butterflies and Luna moth, and its nuts are a favorite food for squirrels. It is a shade tree which attracts butterflies and small mammals.

28. **Tulip Poplar** (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). Tulip Poplar is a deciduous tree which can grow to more than 160' in virgin cover forests of the Appalachian Mountains. It is one of the largest of the native trees in eastern North America. It has greenish yellow flowers in May and bears a narrow light brown cone fruit. It is a host for the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail Butterfly and for the caterpillar of *C. angulifera*, a giant silkmoth. This beautiful shade tree provides nesting and roosting sites for birds. Its spring nectar attracts hummingbirds and pollinators. In fall and winter, the winged seeds feed squirrels and birds.

29. **Water Oak** (*Quercus nigra*). Water Oak is in the red oak group and is native to the eastern and south-central United States. It is a medium-sized deciduous tree. The leaves have a lobe which looks as if a drop of water is hanging from the end of the leaf. It produces acorns which are 3/8"-1/2' long. Compared to other oaks, it is short-lived, with only a 60-80 year life span. The Water Oak produces a heavy crop of acorns which are a good food source for white-tailed deer, eastern gray squirrels, raccoons, mice, and wild turkeys. Migratory waterfowl frequently forage for the acorns, too. Its foliage supports numerous butterfly and moth larvae. The dense canopy provides cover, nesting materials, and resting perches for various birds.

30. **Whitt Pecan**

31. **Pine Tree**



Shrubs:

1. **Althea** (*Hibiscus syriacus*). The Althea shrub's name primarily refers to a Greek name meaning "healer" or "wholesome." In Greek mythology, Althaea (or Althea) was Queen of Calydon. The Althea is a beautiful flowering shrub, also known as Rose of Sharon. It blooms in late summer and is an excellent low-maintenance shrub for attracting wildlife. The blooms attract local pollinators like bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds during mid-summer to fall. The dry seed pods can attract small seed-foraging birds during late fall and winter.
2. **Brown Turkey Fig** (*Ficus carica*). The Brown Turkey Fig bush can produce two crops of figs each year, great for preserves, canning, and eating fresh. It yields medium-sized, sweet, brownish-purple figs with amber-colored, fine-grained flesh. It prefers full sun and can grow to a mature height of 10'-20'. This bush has palm-shaped leaves with typically 3 to 5 lobes, which can grow up to 10" in length. It provides a lush, tropical appearance. The leaves are prized in cooking to impart a subtle, coconut-like flavor to savory dishes when steamed or wrapped around meats and fish.
3. **Red Crepe Myrtle** (*Lagerstroemia* hybrids or *indica*). These beautiful ornamental trees feature vibrant scarlet or cherry-red blooms from summer to fall. They can grow from 15'-20'+. Crepe Myrtles are low maintenance, but require full sun for maximum blooms. Their blooms support pollinators like bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds during the summer. The dry, winged crepe myrtle seeds provide a crucial food source in the winter for native songbirds, such as goldfinches and sparrows. Its branches provide protective covers and nesting sites for small birds.



Vines:

1. **Black Jumbo Muscadine.** This Muscadine vine is a vigorous, large-fruited female cultivar. Its grapes have a reddish-black skin, which ripen mid-to-late season. In addition to fresh eating, the grapes are frequently used for juice, jelly, and homemade wine. White-tailed deer, black bears, foxes, raccoons, opossums, skunks, and squirrels enjoy consuming the grapes, along with turkey, quail, wood ducks, and dozens of species of songbirds. The vines serve as vital larval hosts for the Nessus Sphinx and Mournful Sphinx moths.
<https://extension.msstate.edu/blogs/extension-for-real-life/quick-tips-for-starting-grow-muscadines>
2. **Cowart Muscadine.** The Cowart Muscadine provides a large dark purple-black muscadine grape. It has a sweet flavor and is disease resistant. It is good for fresh eating, jam and jelly making, juicing, and home winemaking. The vines form dense, ornamental foliage and create a natural shade throughout the growing season. It is a low maintenance vine which provides a durable, flavorful, and high-yielding muscadine grape. It can grow 8'-12' high.
3. **Southern Sweet Scuppernong.** Scuppernongs are a bronze-colored variety of muscadine grape (*Vitis rotundifolia*) native to the Southeastern United States. The grape is known for its rich sweetness and a wild, musky flavor. The grapes ripen in late summer, typically between August and September. The grape can be eaten fresh (with the seeds usually squeezed out or spit out). The scuppernong makes excellent jellies, preserves, and sweet Southern wines. It is high in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals which support heart and brain health. Scuppernongs are highly prized by home gardeners in Mississippi and across the South. They require full sun, well-draining soil, and a sturdy trellis or arbor to support the vines.