

TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

TN - Recreation - 1

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The following information on Nature Trails was prepared by Robert J. Lemaire, Conservation Biologist, Nebraska.

NATURE TRAILS

A well planned and adequately labeled nature trail can develop an awareness and appreciation of plants. These results will be achieved through a better acquaintance with plants and their surroundings.

An inventory of the proposed trail area should be made to determine the principal plants to be labeled. The best way to select the species is to go over, on foot, the proposed area and record with a notebook those grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees for future designation. This should be done every three or four weeks during the growing season so that early- and late-flowering plants, as well as those that bloom in midsummer, will be identified for visitors. It will sometimes be necessary to transplant conspicuous or otherwise interesting species adjacent to the trail if they do not already occur there.

The trail should lead through a variety of habitats such as woodland, rocky ridges, streamside, prairie, swamp and marsh to increase interest.

A loop or figure eight shape with entrance and exit in the same general location is preferred. The figure eight enables visitors to use only half the trail if they so desire, and a winding one-way trail affords a sense of seclusion.

The ideal length of a trail is about one-half mile and takes approximately 45 minutes of walking time. Short trails cut fatigue and keep interest high.

The trail surface should be reasonably smooth, without being artificial. Wood chips or sawdust often serve well for this purpose.

Avoid steep slopes to a trail whenever possible. These are not only tiring, but increase erosion and maintenance problems.

A nature trail should have a name. Beaver Pond Trail, Snake River Falls Trail and Bur Oak Trail are a few examples. The trail name sign should be conspicuous at the beginning of the trail.

Legibility and permanence are two important requirements of nature trail labels. Plastic labels are especially durable. Laminated

plastic, which comes in many color combinations, can be inscribed on machines made for that purpose and produce signs that are legible, attractive and durable. Printing paper labels can also be affixed to the back of clear plastic and covered with several coats of liquid resin for durability.

Plant labels should contain the common name, and below (in smaller letters), the scientific name of the plant.

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