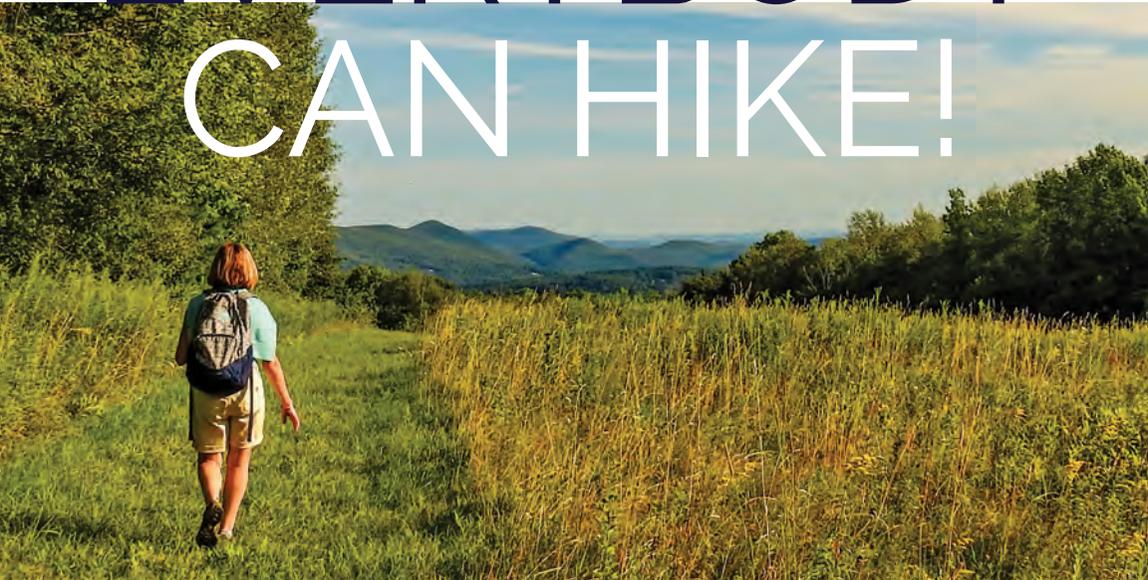


BERKSHIRE NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL

EVERYBODY CAN HIKE!



Tips for free hiking in the Berkshires





About Berkshire Natural Resources Council

BNRC is a donor and volunteer supported conservation organization. Its mission is to protect and preserve the natural beauty and ecological integrity of the Berkshires, for public benefit and enjoyment.

BNRC cares for tens of thousands of acres of conserved land across Berkshire County—forests, fields, vistas, waters, farms, and more. Fifty-eight BNRC reserves are free and open to the public, and include more than 60 miles of hiking trails. There is everything from casual riverside walks and accessible trails, to challenging summits with expansive views.

All are welcome on BNRC lands. BNRC also offers free guided group hikes and special events, educational programs, and volunteer workdays. The BNRC community wants to provide outdoor experiences that are comfortable, inviting, and accessible for people with a broad range of abilities, identities, and backgrounds.

Check out BNRC events and trails with your family or friends any time! You can walk, relax, picnic, fish, ski, swim, watch birds, pick blueberries, hunt, and more on BNRC lands. To learn more about how you can enjoy the Berkshire outdoors—including information about top trails, the free BNRC Berkshire Trails mobile app, guided hikes, and more—please visit **BNRC.org**.

*All of the present-day Berkshires are the ancestral homeland of the Mohican people, who were forcefully displaced to Wisconsin by European colonization. These lands continue to be of great significance to the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Nation today. To learn more, visit **mohican.com**.*

An Introduction to Exploring Nature in the Berkshires

Spending time in the woods can be good for the body, mind, and spirit. It's great exercise and being in nature can take away the day's worries and stress.

This guide will help you learn about the lands cared for by Berkshire Natural Resources Council, which are open and free of charge for all to enjoy. BNRC trails offer a range of experience, from more casual trips into the woods, to challenging hikes. You will find information about what to bring and how to prepare to stay comfortable, safe, and confident when you're out on the trail. This information can be used as a reference guide as you explore the Berkshire outdoors in all seasons.

Safety and comfort on BNRC trails are important. If you want more advice or support on staying safe and being prepared to enjoy your hike in the Berkshires, email BNRC staff at frontdesk@bnrc.org or call 413-499-0596.



Planning your Hike

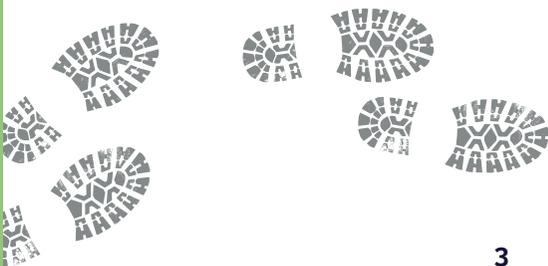
Plan before you go. Every BNRC reserve has a trail map in English (bnrc.org/trail-maps) and Spanish (bnrc.org/mapas-de-senderos).

The map shows:

- Where to park
- The trailhead (where the hike begins)
- The length and difficulty of each trail

Each reserve has a trailhead with paper versions of the map, and kiosks with maps and other useful information. If the map boxes are empty, you can take a picture of the map on the kiosk.

Rules about dogs, and guidelines for recreation, are on the kiosk and online at bnrc.org/bnrc-reserve-policies.



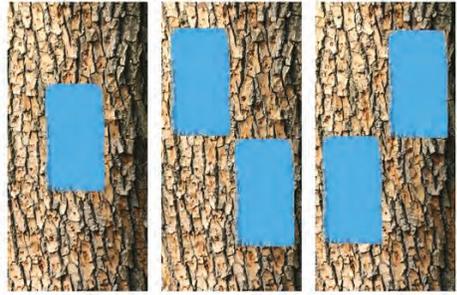
Some Common Questions

How long does it take to hike a trail?

- Walking pace is different for everybody and can be affected by factors like age or physical ability. On average it takes someone without a mobility limitation 20-30 minutes to walk a mile at an easy pace.

Can I bring my dog?

- BNRC allows dogs on its trails, on leash or fully under your control. Keep your dog from running up to and jumping on other people, and away from animal habitats, like fields (protect nesting birds), and wetlands (protect amphibians).
- Bring bags or a sealable container to remove their waste, and a leash, water, and bowl. Please be aware that BNRC trailheads are not equipped with trash cans, so take dog and other waste with you when you leave.



Straight blaze Trail turns left Trail turns right

How do I keep from getting lost?

- Bring a paper map, use the free BNRC Berkshire Trails App, and keep an eye on the trees: most BNRC trails are marked with blazes (painted marks or tags on trees) and signs with descriptions and arrows on them. (See the example in the photo above.) Most trails also have signage at trail junctions.

What should I do if I get lost or need help?

- Don't panic, you probably aren't far from the trail. Look for the blue blazes. If you lose track of the trail, retrace your last dozen or so steps, but do not start to wander far from where you got lost. If you have a phone and a few bars of service, you can download our BNRC Berkshire Trails App and see exactly where you are. In a true emergency, don't hesitate to call 911.

Can I camp out?

- No. BNRC reserves are open from dawn to dusk; camping or campfires are not allowed. Many state forests allow camping—visit mass.gov/visit-massachusetts-state-parks for more information.



Are there bathrooms out there?

- BNRC reserves do not have restrooms. Here are some tips for using the bathroom in the woods:
 - Find privacy by walking off-trail and behind a tree. If you're with someone, that person can warn you of nearby hikers.
 - You can carry a bandana as a "pee rag" or toilet paper in a small zip-top bag. Carry out the toilet paper and dispose of it at home.
 - If you need to poop on a day hike, be prepared with hand sanitizer, a sealable plastic bag, a small shovel, and toilet paper. Please go off-trail 200' (or 70 steps) away from a trail or water source. Find a spot with loose, rich soil. Using your small shovel, or a stick, rock, or boot heel, dig a hole about 4" wide and 6" to 8" deep. Place the toilet paper in the waste bag to dispose of later. Cover the waste with the original dirt and sanitize your hands.

How can I prepare for the weather?

- Do your best to avoid inclement weather by checking the forecast. Mobile weather apps can help you know what to expect. The Rain Alarm app alerts you when rain is near. Weatherbug Spark has a lightning detection feature that provides the closest lightning strike, so you can know before the storm hits.
- If you get caught in a thunderstorm while hiking, seek shelter in a low area under a growth of small trees. Don't wait to throw on your rain jacket.



What to Wear

Clothing: Wearing the right layers for a hike can keep you comfortable and safe in every season. **Plan ahead:** it might be warm at the start of your hike, but cold and breezy at the top of the mountain.

In every season wearing a **base layer** that is wool or synthetic is better than cotton because wool and synthetics help keep your body dry. Bring a **rain layer** or **windbreaker** depending on the weather forecast. Consider an **extra layer**, like a fleece sweatshirt, in spring and fall. In all seasons a **hat** can be a useful item on the trail—it keeps the sun out of your eyes, insects away from your head, and helps keep you warm in cold weather. **Sunglasses** are helpful on bright days.

Winter tips: Wear a base layer, insulating layer(s) such as fleece or wool, and a warm coat. Don't forget your winter hat, scarf or neck gaiter, gloves or mittens, and warm socks (and tuck some extras in your backpack). Waterproof or windproof pants (like snow pants) are helpful to keep you dry and warm. Sunglasses can help to protect against the glare from the snow.

Sturdy Footwear: Sneakers are fine on flat trails. Boots with a sturdy sole are better for climbing. It takes time to break in hiking boots—don't take a long hike wearing brand new boots.

Don't let snowy or icy conditions stop you. Local and online shops sell **Microspikes** and **Yaktrax**, which can be slipped over your shoes or boots to provide extra traction. Yaktrax work well on flat terrain and icy pavement. Microspikes have more grip and are more effective in very icy conditions.



Microspikes

Snowshoes are a fun way to explore snowy trails and fields. They work best when there are at least six inches of snow on the ground. They can be purchased secondhand at Instant Replay in Pittsfield (10 Lyman St #8, Pittsfield, MA 01201, 413-442-2429) or new at many local outdoor gear suppliers. If you are snowshoeing near ski trails, try your best to walk outside of any ski tracks.

What to Bring

Backpack: A regular backpack or even a shoulder bag works fine for a short hike—it should be big enough to carry your water bottle, snacks, first-aid kit, and an extra layer of clothing.

Water: Make sure to bring water with you—one 20-oz or half-liter bottle should be plenty for a short walk. Plan on drinking that much every hour for longer hikes, even in the winter.

Food: Keep up your energy on the trail with portable snacks like fruit, granola or energy bars, chocolate, or dried jerky. Or just bring your favorite lunch, but please take the wrappers and any leftovers home with you—our human food is not good for wildlife.

Map: Trail maps are helpful to navigate during your walk, see page 3.

Light: (headlamp or flashlight, extra batteries) Remember it gets dark by 4:30 p.m. in the winter—if you think you might be out after dark, a headlamp or flashlight will help get you home. Your phone's flashlight may not be strong enough.

Sunscreen/sunblock (year-round): The sun can be strong even in winter and snow reflects sunlight up at you.

Bug spray to keep the mosquitoes and gnats away. For more information about ticks, see page 9.

First-aid Kits are a must in case of bites, blisters or sprains.

Basic first-aid kit:

- Any personal medications you might need (inhaler, EpiPen, etc.)
- Antiseptic wipes, hand sanitizer and antibacterial ointment
- Assorted adhesive bandages, gauze pads, and medical tape
- Blister treatment (such as moleskin)
- Ibuprofen, insect bite treatment, antihistamine (for allergic reactions)
- Tweezers for splinters or removing debris from a cut
- First-aid manual or information cards
- Plastic bags for carrying out waste
- In winter: space blanket (for keeping warm), hand and foot warmers



Dos and Don'ts

Do pick a few berries or harvest some herbs.

Please pick only enough for yourself—don't harvest herbs for a crowd or to sell. And please be careful of poison ivy and other toxic plants.

Do feel free to smile and say hi to anyone you meet along the trail. Hikers are friendly folk!

While you are welcome to walk anywhere on BNRC properties, we ask you to **stay on the trail** whenever possible. They are built to prevent erosion and steer people away from sensitive habitats.

Do step aside, if you can, when a group is coming towards you on a narrow trail, especially if they are going uphill.

If you are a smoker, **do be considerate** of second-hand smoke. Consider bringing nicotine gum to ensure an enjoyable visit for all. If you do smoke on the trail, remember to leave no trace and pack out your cigarette butts.

Other handy items: these may add to your enjoyment of the trail.

- Mobile device with favorite apps (try the BNRC Trails App) and camera. Solar chargers are helpful for longer hikes.
- Binoculars, field guides (to birds, butterflies, wildflowers, or trees), journal or notebook.
- Trekking poles help to keep your balance on rough trails and take pressure off your knees when climbing. A sturdy walking stick can also help.
- Gaiters cover your leg from the bottom of your foot to mid-calf and are made with sturdy weather-resistant materials to protect your foot and lower leg from deep snow, wet underbrush, ticks, or debris.
- Fishing pole: Please note that the Massachusetts Department of Health advises that no one eat fish caught in the Housatonic River and tributaries that feed into the main river from Center Pond Dam in Dalton to the Connecticut border due to PCB contamination. Find out more information here: mass.gov/doc/fish-and-waterfowl-consumption-advice-for-the-housatonic-river-area-in-massachusetts/download.



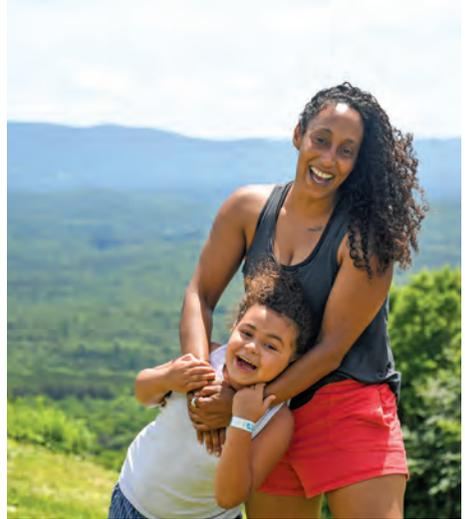
Safety tips

Hiking is a safe activity—accidents or other incidents are extremely rare, and you'll find that the other hikers you meet are friendly. It's important to be prepared for events like changes in weather, so check the forecast before you go! It's always a good idea to let someone know where you'll be hiking and when you expect to be back.

Ticks

Ticks can cause serious illnesses like Lyme disease and babesiosis, so it's essential to prevent them from biting. While ticks can remain active year-round, tick activity peaks twice a year: March through August and October through November. Some simple tick prevention methods can help reduce your exposure:

- Tuck your shirt into your pants and your pants into your socks.
- Consider wearing gaiters, which are protective sleeves that cover your ankles and legs below the knee.
- Wear light colors, so you can identify the ticks more easily if they are on you. They are tiny, so look closely.
- Use bug repellent. There are many types of repellents: essential oil-based or chemicals such as permethrin or DEET, which can be applied to limited areas like shoes and pants.



- Stick to the trail! Ticks hang out in shaded, grassy areas. Staying on established trails is good prevention, but is not foolproof. This is one more great reason to keep dogs, which can be tick magnets, on leash.
- Check out any areas before you sit down.
- Check yourself regularly (during and after your walk), with a buddy if possible.
- Take a shower after your hike.
- Check your backpack and clothing to make sure no ticks are hiding out in the corners.

Don't let ticks scare you off from outdoor fun, but do be careful and proactive! If you do get bitten by a tick, see [cdc.gov/ticks/pdfs/FS_TickBite-508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/pdfs/FS_TickBite-508.pdf) for more information about what to do.

Plant Safety

Be aware of poison ivy, a common plant that causes an itchy skin rash. Remember "leaves of three, let it be," meaning the plant has three leaves on a single stem. Staying on the trail is the best way to prevent touching the plant.



Poison ivy

Be aware of stinging nettle. Stinging nettle is not poisonous, and it has medicinal uses, but touching it can cause a stinging sensation. The plant most often grows in wet meadows. Again, staying on the trail is the best way to prevent brushing up against it.



Stinging nettle

Water Safety

Don't drink water from streams, rivers, or ponds unless you use a water purifier. The water may look clean but could have parasites or bacteria that could make you sick.

Hunting

All BNRC reserves, except Parsons Marsh and Roosevelt, are open to hunting, subject to Massachusetts state and local regulations. Hunting is prohibited on Sundays in Massachusetts. Hunting information is posted at all BNRC trailheads.



For safety during hunting season (mostly October-December), we recommend wearing bright orange outerwear (on dogs too), staying on existing trails, and keeping dogs under your immediate control.

What to Look for on the Trail

Bears and Other Wildlife

While hiking, normal trail noise (talking, crunching leaves and twigs) will alert bears to your presence and often prompt them to move away without being noticed. If you see a bear, it may not immediately recognize you as a human and may be curious about you. Make the animal aware of your presence by clapping, talking, or making other sounds while slowly backing away. *Do not approach bears or intrude between a female bear and her cubs.* Keep dogs leashed and stay a respectful distance away.



Other animals you might see on the trail include rabbits, foxes, otters, beavers, deer, and, if you're lucky, moose.

Hundreds of bird species have been observed in the Berkshires, as well as **butterflies, salamanders, and frogs.** Every trail has different wildflowers, trees, rock formations and **traces of human history**—you may see old stone walls or the foundations of a 200-year-old homestead.

Walk intentionally,
observe your
surroundings,
and enjoy!





BERKSHIRE
Natural Resources Council

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Accessible spaces are everyone spaces.

BNRC's accessible trails have been designed to meet the US Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines for access. The trails maintain proper width, tread, slope, and barrier-free access for wheelchairs, strollers, and mobility aids. The surface of the trails are hard packed stone and wooden decking. They also include wayfinding signage and resting areas. Find more detailed information by visiting bnrc.org.

Created in partnership with:



Unpaved Trails For All



Berkshire Taconic
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

This project has been supported by a grant from the Crane Family Fund of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation.



Scan to find trails and donate!

All of this is made possible by donors.
Anyone can donate to BNRC anytime
at bnrc.org/donate.

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Marina Dominguez: P 6, back cover; Robert Watroba: P 11 (deer)

