

Outdoor offerings in and around Worcester

Tower Hill Botanical Gardens

Boylston, MA

Located about 8 miles outside of Worcester, this arboretum contains 17 distinct gardens and many miles of walking trails. The visitor's center hosts educational and seasonal events. Inside the visitor's center, a café offers healthy, seasonal meals.

Douglas State Forest

Douglas, MA

This state forest south of Worcester is comprised of over 5,000 acres. Wallum Lake offers swimming and boating in the warmer months. The trail system is well-marked, a portion of which passes the Midstate Trail (a trail that extends from central Massachusetts north to Mount Watatic). The most distinct feature of Douglas State Forest is the Atlantic White Cedar swampland. A boardwalk trail takes you through this unique habitat of plants and animals.

Moore State Park

Paxton, MA

Moore State Park spans 400 acres just to the Northwest of Worcester. Hikers note the beautiful flowers and waterfalls among the stone mill foundations and restored sawmill. In addition to hiking, canoeing, fishing, hunting, cross-country skiing, and picnicking are popular activities. In the warmer seasons, concerts and other programs are held.

Mount Wachusett

Princeton, MA

At 2,000-foot, this is the highest point in Massachusetts east of the Connecticut River. In the spring, summer, and fall, you can explore 92 miles of hiking trails to the summit. In the winter, you can enjoy 25 ski trails, 18 of which are available for night skiing. The lodge also hosts a number of events and festivals through the year.

Rutland State Park

Rutland, MA

With over 400 acres of protected land, this park offers activities year-round. There is hiking, kayaking, and horseback riding in the warmer months, and snow shoeing and cross-country skiing in the winter. Public restrooms and picnic areas make this location perfect for families or outdoor gatherings.

Sibley Farm

Spencer, MA

This old dairy farm was at risk of being developed into a strip mall, until local students partnered with Mass Audubon and the Greater Worcester Land Trust to preserve these 350 acres. Now, you can enjoy scenic hikes through wildflowers and along ponds.

Westville Recreation Area

Sturbridge, MA

Westville Recreation Area boasts ample parking and trails of varying degrees of difficulty. Picnic areas, short hikes, and large open spaces make this a great daytrip for families. Westville Lake provides the opportunity to canoe and kayak in the spring, summer, and fall. In the winter, the park is perfect for ice skating and sledding. For those interested in more challenging hikes, Westville Recreation Area connects to the Grand Trunk Trail. This is an historic, scenic trail that runs along an old trolley railroad. It is part of the larger Trolley Line Trail that stretches for more than 60 miles from Central Massachusetts to Connecticut.

Purgatory State Park

Sutton, MA

While the hiking trails in this state park are shorter than others on this list, Purgatory Chasm State Park is unique for its rock climbing offerings. This park has numerous interesting rock formations, the most notable of which being its name sake – Purgatory Chasm. This is a 0.25-mile-long, 70-foot-deep chasm of granite.

Broad Meadow Brook Conservation Center and Wildlife Sanctuary

Worcester, MA

Broad Meadow Brook is the largest urban wildlife sanctuary in New England. Well-marked trails wind through over 400 acres of marshland, fields, streams, and forests. There are educational offerings year-round, along with nature play areas and sensory trails. The sanctuary hosts 80 species of butterflies, 164 species of birds, and over 700 species of plants.

Green Hill Park

Worcester, MA

Just down the road from Hahnemann Family Health Center, and atop one of Worcester's seven hills, sits almost 500 acres of multi-use space that is listed on the National Register of Historic Spaces. This estate once belonged to Andrew Green, the man responsible for the development of New York City's Central Park. Today, Greenhill Park contains a golf course, miles of hiking trails, a small zoo of farm animals, athletic fields, and an arboretum. It hosts numerous events through the year.

The Cascades Trail System

Worcester, MA

These hilly, wooded trails over 156 acres in Worcester will take you through fields of wildflowers, a dam bridge, and a pond. The waterfall is the highlight of these urban trails that are maintained by the Greater Worcester Land Trust.

The Rail Trail

Central Massachusetts

A railroad once stretched across the state from Boston to Northampton until a hurricane decimated the line in 1938. In recent years, conservation groups have restored the trail for hiking and bike riding. As of now, about 50 miles are open with more in various stages of renovation. You can access the trail from various towns in central Massachusetts – Berlin, Clinton, Holden, Rutland, and West Boylston.

For a more comprehensive list, visit the Greater Worcester Land Trust at <http://www.gwlt.org/lands-and-trails/>. This non-profit organization's mission is to preserve the open space in and around Worcester.