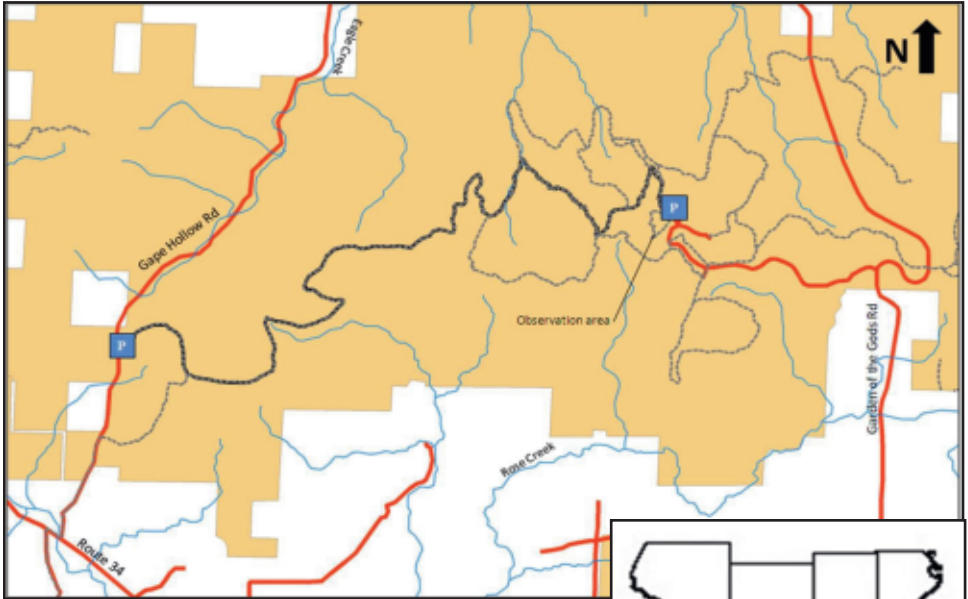


# Garden of the Gods Trail

Shawnee National forest

5.5 mile - Moderate Rating

Trailhead: 37.6049, -88.3846



This large site is one of seven wilderness areas within the Shawnee National Forest in southern Illinois. The majority of this area is within Saline County, but also includes Gallatin, Hardin, and Pope counties. This is probably the most visited site within the Shawnee National Forest and the main feature is the observation area called Garden of the Gods. The views of the sandstone outcrops in the observation area are unparalleled in southern Illinois. One can see a rolling terrain of trees stretch for miles in several directions without hardly a sign of manmade structures. The iconic “Camel Rock” is in this area.

While there are numerous trails that penetrate the heart of the wilderness, the must-do hike is the 5.5-mile trail from Herod to the parking lot of the observation area. This trail is not a loop so you will need to leave a vehicle at the end or arrange for a ride back to your vehicle. North of the small town of Herod is a parking lot on the west side of Gape Hollow Road, and the trail starts here. Cross the road and shortly after you will enter the wilderness area. There are many beautiful cliffs and scenic views along this trail, and all the trail intersections are marked. At the first juncture follow the River-to-River trail to the left (east). After a long climb uphill, the trail follows an escarpment where several great picnic spots are available, providing expansive views to the east. The trail descends and at the next juncture the River-to-River trail goes right,

but for the more scenic route take a left. Walk through the bottom of the canyon and admire the tall cliffs on both sides. At the next juncture, take the trail right. Just before ascending another hill, look up to the left for “H-Rock,” another well-known feature in this area. The sandstone arch is quite remarkable. Four trails come together at the next intersection. Follow the trail left to the observation parking lot and follow the remaining trails to the right. One more climb takes hikers past “Anvil Rock” and back to the parking lot at the observation area. No matter which trail you hike, be sure to leave the observation area and explore the wilderness.

Another notable hike in this area is the Indian Point Trail. This starts at the backpacker’s parking lot which is the first area encountered on the entrance road. The 2-mile loop trail takes the traveler along the base of the cliffs and along the top of the bluff, providing outstanding views along the way. Nearby in the seep springs, green fringed orchids can be found.

## Notable wildflowers present at site

Pencil flower  
*Stylosanthes biflora*

Slender bush clover  
*Lespedeza virginica*

Spider lily  
*Hymenocallis caroliniana*

Wild hydrangea  
*Hydrangea arborescens*

Wild rose  
*Rosa carolina*



Camel rock. Wilderness sign (right inset)  
H-rock (left inset)