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10 Greenest Places to Retire

Parks can make even the densest and driest locales seem like cities in gardens

By *Katy Marquardt*

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If your idea of retirement is a permanent vacation, it makes sense to choose a locale with plenty of wide-open spaces. Parks not only provide refuge from the noise and bustle of the city, but they also strengthen neighborhoods, reduce pollution, and inspire lazy strolls and impromptu picnics.



Parks are especially vital for densely populated urban areas, says Peter Harnik, director of the Center for City Park Excellence at the Trust for Public Land. "The more crowded a city is, the more important parks are," he says. "Fewer and fewer people have their own private green space, so they depend on public space."

The nation's largest cities spent a record \$4.3 billion on their park systems in 2005, according to the latest data available from the Trust for Public Land. It estimates that the combined area of these cities' parks—more than 808,500 acres—is larger than Yosemite National Park.

U.S. News came up with a list of [green retirement destinations](#) drawn from our list of more than 1,000 [Best Places to Retire](#). A [search tool](#) allows you to build your own list of retirement spots based on your personal preferences, including region, climate, healthcare, recreational and cultural activities, and other factors.

Some cities on the list may not fit your definition of "green." For example, **Phoenix's** arid climate and desert terrain may seem odd next to the lush greenery of **Portland, Ore.** But each city on the list is generous when it comes to park systems that offer public space.

Parks range from the traditional to the unexpected. At the extremes are urbanized landscapes with few trees and wild preserves located in dense forests or marshland. The latter is plentiful inside **Jacksonville, Fla.**'s city limits. Nature parks there, including Castaway Island Preserve, span more than 50,000 acres and include trails for horseback riding, hiking, biking—and even canoeing. "These are passive, get-back-to-nature areas, not typical parks with hardball fields," says Kelley Boree,

Jacksonville's deputy director of recreation and community services.

On the other hand, **Virginia Beach** boasts the most playgrounds of any city in the country, which could come in handy for outings with visiting grandchildren. Cities like **Austin**, **Colorado Springs**, and **Raleigh, N.C.** offer a balanced mix of wilderness preserves and landscaped parks. Austin's Zilker Metropolitan Park, located just minutes from downtown, includes hike-and-bike trails, a hillside theater, a swimming hole, and botanical and sculpture gardens.

In Colorado Springs' 1,600-acre North Cheyenne Cañon Park, you might encounter a black bear or mule deer where the mountains meet the foothills and plains. Those seeking a tamer urban escape may instead favor Monument Valley Park, with its bridged ponds and wildflower gardens. For social butterflies, Raleigh's Parks and Recreation department offers retiree-focused classes and hosts clubs, card nights, and dances.

Even densely developed cities made the green list. **Chicago**, for example, claims 7,300 acres of parkland, 552 parks, and 33 beaches. The city's stunning skyline plays backdrop to many landscaped parks and playgrounds, which feature scenic ponds and manicured gardens. Cities in the Southwest are working to preserve their wide-open spaces from encroaching development.

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