

The Playgarden in the Forest

Forest Manual



What is The Playgarden Forest Program?

The Forest Program curriculum is not predetermined; instead, our day flows organically based on the conditions of our natural environment. Teachers do not lead play, rather they facilitate it. The role of the Forest Teacher, as David Sobel states, is not that of “sage on the stage” but “guide on the side.” As Erin Kenny writes, “close contact with nature contributes to young children’s motor, sensory, social, emotional, moral and cognitive development...a child’s experience during this formative period [ages 0-5] determines their view of the world, how they will interact with others and their own feelings of self-confidence.”

We believe that learning and creativity are fostered through direct experiences with the natural world. While our daily and weekly rhythms will be consistent, just as they are in our main campus programs, they will also allow the children’s interests to lead the day.

Seasonal changes will be honored in our rhythm. Families and children of the Forest Program will be participating in seasonal festivals with the larger Playgarden community throughout the year. We will also be celebrating the seasons in ways that are unique to the forest in the form of songs, crafts, and daily experiences.

This is a brief introduction to understanding what our forest program is. Throughout the course of the year, we will be communicating additional relevant information as it applies to this program. We encourage you to use this manual in conjunction with The Playgarden Parent Handbook and Forest Kindergartens, The Cedarsong Way. A copy of this book is available in the parent library located in the Kinderhaus.

We look forward to a magical year in the forest with your child!

Warmly,

Your Forest Teachers

Field Trip locations:

Hanna Park: main base camp is located under Grand Father Oak. Most of our year will take place at base camp as our starting point to our adventures.

Dutton Island: We typically go to Dutton Island during the coldest month of the year. During our time here we are able to build campfires for warmth and the kiddos get to enjoy hammocks. We also have our class Stone Soup celebraton during this month and end our time at Dutton with an annual all forest class campout.

Hanna Park Parking Pass

You will need to purchase a Hanna Park Annual Pass for \$100 per car for drop off and pick up. Purchase here: [LINK](#). This pass allows for early entry and is a gift for your family to have access to all that Hanna offers: forest, beach, camping, kayaking, bike trails, water park, and so much more. Please note: It costs \$5 per entry to the park, which means \$5 at drop off and \$5 at pick up, no reentry allowed, so it is a big cost savings. If you change cars, get a rental, or have an expired pass, you must pay \$5 for each entry. Please plan ahead to get and renew your pass. Hanna Park is an independent company, and the staff is there to maintain the park system only. Please review Hanna Park Rules here: [LINK](#). The speed limit is strictly enforced at 25 miles an hour. We recommend lowering windows and music to enjoy a peaceful entry to the park. Please assist us in being honored stewards of Hanna Park. Please direct any questions about parking to admin@theplaygarden.org.

Your Child's Physical Safety and Emotional Well-being

Our forest discipline guidelines are consistent with those at our main campus.

Age appropriate discipline for the young child can be approached on several levels. At The Playgarden the teachers strive to lead by example and to be worthy of imitation by the children. The teachers work to create a positive, emotionally calm atmosphere where the teacher sets consistent boundaries. Warmth, humor, song and predictable weekly rhythms are just a few tools that help create an environment where children can learn and thrive. Our teachers carefully observe the interactions and play of the children so that they will know when it is time to redirect a child to prevent a difficult situation before it begins. The teachers assist the children to right a wrong situation and care for a child whom they might have harmed, oftentimes by helping a child to retrieve a boo-boo ball for an injured friend.

Teachers strive to set a tone of respect and empathy and to strengthen the social instincts of the classes. Teachers also work with parents to help create a home life that has a healthy discipline and a sense of calm and connection. We know this can be a challenging task and are here to work alongside of the families and offer our input and resources. The Playgarden strives to work in partnership to help your child grow and develop to self-regulation. If a child displays ongoing aggressive or negative behavior, his/her teacher will arrange for a meeting to discuss this behavior. Parents are asked to share with their child's teacher any circumstances that might affect the child's behavior at school, such as family issues, visitors at home, illnesses, etc. This information will always be held in confidence and is essential to a teacher's work with the children.

Sharing such information will assist in the process of our school and a child's family to better understand a child's difficulties and develop a consistent plan to address issues at home and in school. At times a teacher may recommend additional services or request medical attention be provided to help better address and understand a child's particular needs. This will be done in the spirit of working in partnership with families to help find resources to assist the child to thrive physically, intellectually, and developmentally.

Hitting, biting, or otherwise hurting other children, is a fairly common and age-appropriate behavior of a young child. Children will sometimes bite/hit in an effort to communicate frustration or anger before the child has learned to communicate these feelings with words. However, it is necessary that a child be sent home when biting (or other harmful behavior) occurs. This helps to impress upon the child and the other children that biting behavior is not tolerated in school.

We will discourage competitiveness and encourage cooperation in all our activities and games. We will have a no tolerance policy for hitting, grabbing, pinching, name-calling, and aggressive or exclusive behavior. If this does occur, the teachers may remove the child to a calm place and listen to the child's concern. The safety of every child is of utmost importance to your forest teachers.

The open format of our nature-based curriculum requires that children can follow multistep directions and identify boundaries. The safety of every child is of utmost importance to campus and forest teachers on campus and on field trips. If your child hides or runs away from the class as a stress response and is unable to follow directives to comfortably stay with the group, your child may be sent home for the remainder of the day.

For the health of your child and the safety of all of the children, if after working with you to help your child to participate harmoniously in-class activities, help your child in the process of separation from his or her home environment, use kind hands with their friends, or repeatedly run/hide, it may be necessary to ask that your child be withdrawn from the school. Such a decision would be made by the College of Teachers after substantial discussion and deliberation with all parties involved. In such an event, it is the school's policy to return any prepaid tuition, but not the enrollment fee, snack & supply fee, deposit, or any tuition applicable to the time the child attended the school as outlined in your signed Financial Contract.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Early and/or Late Bird options are not available in the forest
- Punctuality is extremely important for arrival and dismissal
- If you are going to be late for either arrival or dismissal, please contact your teacher and the office: 904-241-3259
- If your child is going to be absent, please contact your teacher and the office (904-241-3259) before the school day begins
- If you will be going on a planned vacation, please let your teacher and the office know at least a week in advance

Potting in the Forest

We understand that there will be occasional accidents, but we prefer that all children be toilet proficient in the forest, and be comfortable with "going" outside and should be able to wipe themselves with minimal assistance. We will make the potty place as private as can be. We have a portable potty chair, biodegradable waste bags, and wipes. We always strive to leave no trace in the forest.

Dressing Appropriately

Dressing your child appropriately is critical to your child's enjoyment and comfort while playing and learning in the Forest program. Appropriate gear is non-negotiable and essential to your child's participation for the day. Remember, this is an all-outdoor program. Make sure you and your child understand and are comfortable with that.

Clothing and Gear Requirements:

- A media-free, child sized backpack that they can carry and open on their own (we really like this backpack from REI: <https://www.rei.com/product/102016/rei-co-op-tarn-12-pack-kids>)
- A media-free, insulated water bottle; preferably 12 oz.
- A media-free lunch box with cold pack
- Label all of your child's clothing
- Dress your child in clothes that can get dirty
- Dress your child in clothes and close-toed shoes (without laces) that they can easily take on and off by themselves. Elastic waistbands are preferred and easier for the child.
- Do not dress your child in one piece overalls; they are difficult to remove when children need to potty
- Your child will need a full set of change into clothes in a labeled Ziploc bag or waterproof re-usable zip-bag that will be kept with our forest gear
- No jewelry or headbands, which can easily catch on limbs, vines and play structures
- Clothing treated with Permethrin to repel ticks and mosquitoes is an option that can be explored when purchasing items for your child (L.L. Bean, Insect Shield, Dog Not Gone)

Warm Weather Gear

Forest: light weight pants, shorts, cotton breathable comfortable Shorts or skorts only please, *no skirts or dresses.*

Shoes: hiking boots or sneakers to protect their feet. *You will receive a detailed list of specific gear .*

Beach: 2-piece swimsuits under clothes or swim trunks that can be worn as shorts into the forest, and change into dry shorts after the beach if they want. If your child is uncomfortable with the swimsuit lining, please feel free to cut it out.

Shoes: sandals with backstraps or cros/natives are preferred, no flip flops

A comfortable sun hat similar to

www.rei.com/rei-garage/product/114321/sunday-afternoons-explorer-cap-sun-hat-infantstoddlerskids

Wet Weather Gear

Your child is required to have this gear if it is raining or if there is a threat of rain:

Bogs Boots or similar water proof- non leaking -snug around the calf- boots.

Rain pants similar to Oakiwear, Lands' End, or REI brand.

A light-weight rain coat with adjustable velcro closures at the wrist and a snug collar (similar to Columbia or REI). This article of clothing is intended to keep your child dry, not warm. We will use layers for warmth.

Smart Wool socks or similar

Rain hat similar to REI or Outdoor Research brand

Rainy Days: clothing option to wear bathing suits to play in rain/puddles then change into dry clothes and rain gear for remainder of the day.

Cold rainy day clothing: warm layers under rain gear for rain/puddle play then extra set of dry warm layers including underwear and socks and possibly an extra pair of shoes for remainder of day to stay dry and warm.

Cold Weather Gear

Layering is key to comfort during our cold weather days and provides more warmth than one large coat.

Warm jacket and fleece layers

A base layer of 2-piece silk long underwear

Waterproof mittens or gloves

A warm, snug hat or beanie

Smart Wool socks or similar

The Playgarden Forest Program Weather and Emergency Action Plan

Date Plan Created: August 12, 2014

Review Date: June 2025

Introduction

The Northeast Florida weather can pose a threat to safety, and because of that The Playgarden College of Teachers and its Board of Directors have made a strong commitment to our students' physical safety and emotional well-being while under our direction and care in the Forest Program. This Weather and Emergency Action Plan was written in order to maintain our students' safety to the best of our ability at all times. We will review this plan semi- annually to ensure to its adherence and effectiveness.

Weather Appropriate Clothing

Forest classes take place outside in nature in all kinds of weather including light or heavy rain and intense heat and cold. Our Forest class - teachers, volunteers and students - will be required to wear weather appropriate clothing. This allows the children to fully immerse themselves in nature and be content and comfortable. As the old saying goes: "There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing choices." Parents should review the outdoor clothing guidelines given to them by the Forest teacher and ensure that children are dressed accordingly.

Reasonable Safety Rules

The Forest Teachers will address important and reasonable safety rules to students for all activities that could be potentially harmful such as tree climbing, wandering from the group, sharp sticks, and coming into contact with plants, snakes and other animals, and insects.

Severe Weather

The Playgarden staff recognizes that there are dangers in the outdoors and severe weather is one of them. Severe weather constitutes high winds that pose a threat of falling branches and the presence of lightning. Severe weather also includes the threat of hurricanes, tornadoes, and severe thunderstorms.

Severe Weather determination prior to the start of school

Each day before school begins, the Forest Program Lead Teacher will consult the local weather forecast and determine whether the class will make the field trip to Hanna Park or Dutton Island (January) that day. During very rainy days, we may utilize the closest covered shelter, Pavillion 6 for coverage. If not, the class will go to a designated alternate field trip location, or school will be cancelled, depending on the severity of the weather threat.

Severe Weather determination during program hours

The Lead Teacher will be continuously monitoring weather conditions visually and via cell phone during class time. In the event that weather conditions change during class time, the school group will immediately walk to the closest covered shelter, Pavillion 6, near the “Great Meadow” when at Hanna Park, and the main picnic shelter if at Dutton Island, to await pick up by the parents. On rare occasions, forest class may chose to move to the main campus at The Playgarden. Parents are responsible to provide transportation from the field trip location to the school. We have a procedure in place for sending a group text message out to parents in the event that weather conditions change during the program hours and the decision is made to relocate. Parents need to ensure that the school has a current and active cell phone number to use in case of emergency alert.

Consider adding other class parents to pick-up/drop-off list if you choose to carpool.

Lightning Policy

The school’s lightning policy will mirror that of the Atlantic Beach Lifeguard station and calls for evacuation when there is visible lightning.

Alternate Field Trip Location & Pick up

The Playgarden Preschool at 223 8th Avenue South in Jacksonville Beach

Extreme Weather Closures

The Playgarden follows the Duval County School District lead. Parents can follow the Duval County School District school cancellations by checking the radio, their website, or by calling the school district.

If Duval County School is cancelled due to extreme weather, then The Playgarden’s Forest Program will also be cancelled. If the College of Teachers and Board make a decision to differ from this or for any unusual school closing, we will notify you via email (or by phone if you do not have email) by 7 p.m.

Attendance List

At all times, the teachers will have an attendance list with them with full names and addresses of the children and adults, an emergency contact number for caregivers and parents, notations of children with any known allergies, known reactions to insect bites or stings and any other medical conditions, and a full first aid kit and authorized medication a child may need.

Cell phones

All teachers and assistants will have a working, fully charged cell phones with them at all times. In the event that a 911 call is necessary, one teacher will remain with the children while the other teacher steps aside to make the call.

CPR and First Aid

All Forest Teachers have current CPR and First Aid, and Red Cross Lifeguard certifications.

Children with known Medical Needs

It is The Playgarden's policy that teachers be trained by the parents of children with known medical needs in specific emergency procedures for enrolled children, including but not limited to those that require the use of an asthma inhaler or EPIPEN. Please refer to the Parent Handbook for further details.

Teacher Emergency

In case of a teacher emergency, the school's Administrator will be on call to step in on-site. If the school's Administrator is unavailable, there will be a list of substitutes provided to the Forest teachers.

The Playgarden Forest Program

Medical Emergency Plan and Procedures

Date Plan Created: August 12, 2014

Review Date: June 2025

Introduction

Accidents happen, whether in the forest or in our own backyard. The Playgarden College of Teachers and its Board of Directors have made a strong commitment to our students' physical safety and emotional well-being while under our direction and care in the Forest Program. This Medical and Emergency Plan was written to ensure students' safety to the best of our ability at all times. We also want parents and caregivers to be aware of our Forest Program Medical Emergency Protocol. We will review this plan throughout the year to ensure to its adherence and effectiveness.

CPR and First Aid Training

Every Playgarden staff member holds current training certificates in CPR and First Aid. The Forest teachers also hold current Red Cross Life Guard certifications.

First Aid Kits

The Lead Forest Teachers and assistants will both carry small First Aid kits in their backpacks while in the field and have a fully supplied large First Aid Kit in their wagon during school hours. The First Aid kits will be replenished after each use.

Standard Medical Emergency Procedure

In the event that a medical emergency occurs, our staff is trained to follow this standard medical emergency procedure.

- 1) The Lead Forest Teacher will stay with the injured child to assess the injury and administer basic first aid.
- 2) The Forest program assistant will stay with the rest of the class to keep them calm. She will re-engage the children into an activity and take them to a safe area if necessary. For example, the assistant would walk the children a safe distance from a wasp nest.
- 3) The Lead Forest Teacher will administer First Aid to the injured child. All injuries will be treated with RICE protocol – Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation.
- 4) The Lead Forest Teacher will call the injured child's parents to notify them of the injury and the first aid treatment she administered. The Lead Forest Teacher and the parents will then make a verbal decision as to whether the child will stay for the remainder of the school day, or if the parents or an approved caregiver will pick them up at the location.
- 5) If the child's discomfort prevents their ability to participate in class activities, the parents will be required to make arrangements to come and get their child.

Standard Medical Emergency Procedure for Serious and Life Threatening Injuries

- 1) **Snake Bite.** The Lead Forest Teacher will immediately transport the injured child to Beaches Medical Center on 13th Street in Jacksonville Beach. Beaches Medical Center is the closest ER with anti-venom. Estimated 18 minutes via A1A to Penman. The Lead Teacher will notify the hospital by phone that she is on the way, and then notify the parents. There will be a car seat in the Lead Forest vehicle at all times.
- 2) **Severe Bleeding or Head, Neck, or Back Trauma.** The Lead Forest Teacher will stabilize the injury. The assistant will immediately call 911 and the child's parents. Emergency Medical Services will take the child to Beaches Medical Center. There is a fire station less than two miles from Hanna Park and Dutton Island.
- 3) **Broken Bones, Sprains, and Bruises of the Leg, Foot, Hand, Collar Bone, Arm, and Finger.** The Lead Forest Teacher will administer First Aid, stabilize the injury, and call the child's parents to notify them of the injury. The parents will be required to come to the location to retrieve their child to take them to their medical care provider.
- 4) **Sudden Illness.** Sudden illness such as vomiting, diarrhea, fever, and severe headaches will require the parent or an approved caregiver to come to the location and retrieve their child.
- 5) We will make every effort to receive consent from the family regarding emergencies. Forest Gnomeschool staff, under extreme weather or medical emergency, may transport their child to the closest medical facility or call for EMT for transportation.

The Playgarden Forest Program Acknowledgement & Consent

Forest Handbook available to view here: [LINK](#)

Child's Name: _____

Please initial:

- I have read The Playgarden Forest Program Medical Emergency Plan and I agree with the protocol.
- I have read The Playgarden Forest Program Weather and Emergency Action Plan and I agree with the protocol.
- I give my child permission to attend daily field trips to Hanna Park and Dutton Island Preserve
- When an emergency evacuation from Hanna Park or Dutton Island is necessary, I agree to provide transportation for my child from the park to The Playgarden.
- If I cannot provide transportation during an emergency evacuation or medical emergency, my child has permission to ride in a car seat in a Playgarden teacher or administrator's vehicle.
- I will check my child *daily* for ticks, and report to the teacher if one is found. I will save it in a bag after removal, and contact doctor if the area becomes hot or irritated.

I/We have read and agree with the The Playgarden's Forest Program Parent Handbook.

Parent name: _____

signature: _____ date: **8/18/2025**



Kathryn Abbey Hanna Park Trails Map

Hiking Trails

- Scout Trail (0.2 miles, one-way)
- Wellness Trail (6.0 miles, total)

Off-Road Bicycle Trails (all trails are Intermediate Level)

- E-Line Loop (3.8 miles roundtrip)
- South Loop (4.5 miles roundtrip)
- Z-Trail (2.2 miles, one-way)
- Lil Joe (0.2 miles, one-way)

Service Roads

- Service Road (1.1 miles, one-way, available for hiking & biking)

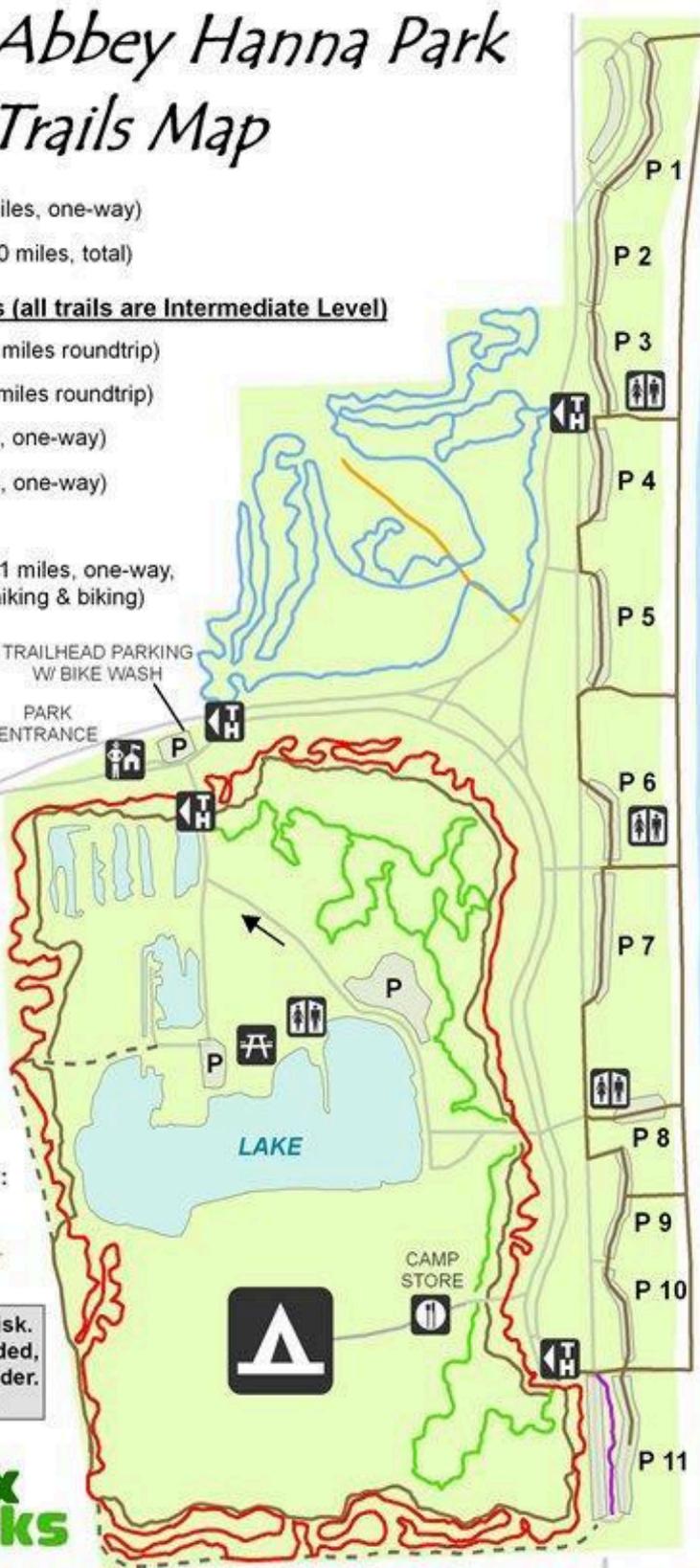


Trailhead

TRAILHEAD PARKING
W/ BIKE WASH

PARK
ENTRANCE

WONDERWOOD DRIVE
MAYPORT ROAD



Bike Trails Maintained by:



Use Trails at your Own Risk.
Bike Helmets Recommended,
Required for Age 16 or under.
Bikes Yield to Hikers.



jax
parks

"THE POLES"

DOLPHIN
PLAZA

PELICAN
PLAZA

ATLANTIC
OCEAN





Dutton Island Preserve

