



GREEN MOUNTAIN **Audubon**
CENTER



**Audubon Forest Preschool
Parent Handbook**

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Description & Location

Audubon Forest Preschool is a half-day drop-off program for children ages 3 to 5 based at the Green Mountain Audubon Center in Huntington, Vermont. The program meets outside the Education Barn, from which the group travels to their forest base camp. The forest camp serves as a home base for tracking the seasonal rhythms of nature and developing a strong connection to the plants and animals that share this home with us.

The forest camp will also serve as the launching pad for further explorations across the landscape; the 252 acres of the Green Mountain Audubon Center give us access to beaver ponds, meadows, sugarbush, hemlock swamp, brook and river all within easy reach during our 3-hour program.

Program Philosophy

The Forest Preschool program seeks to develop the innate bond between children and the natural world by providing a landscape to play, explore, and use all of our senses. Our teachers act as role models and guides: they share in the children's curiosity, ask questions, inspire with stories, and embody empathy towards all living things.

We operate with the following goals and guiding principles:

- **Maximize outdoors time:** We aim to spend all of our time outdoors and will only head inside in the case of severe and/or unsafe weather conditions. We expect children to come prepared with warm and waterproof clothing, and we will develop skills of self-care to stay warm and comfortable. Our goal is to make kids comfortable in all types of weather.
- **Learn through play:** Forest Preschool will offer ample opportunities for free and imaginative play, starting upon arrival where children will be greeted with an assortment of items to build, dig, stack, mix, share, and more. Games and spontaneous play will be woven throughout each day.

- **Plan for spontaneity:** Our teachers will be ready with a theme, story, and activity of the day planned out, but we won't hesitate to adjust those plans as natural learning opportunities emerge and steer us in other directions. We take our cue from nature and from the interests of each child in our inquiry-based teaching approach.
- **Take healthy risks:** Children will develop confidence and an ability to calculate risk for themselves by exploring healthy risks at Forest Preschool. This could mean climbing a rock or balancing on a log, for example. Our staff is trained to supervise and support children in these activities, ensuring safety and steering children away from potentially harmful hazards. Please see the complete Safety Protocols for Education Programs document for specific details on safety procedures and measures at Forest Preschool.

Daily Schedule

9:00 – Drop-off and free play outside the Education Barn. Parents welcome to stay for first 30 minutes.

9:30 – Welcome circle at our forest camp or inside the barn in the case of severe weather

9:45 – Snack and storytime

10-12:00 – Adventure of the day. The theme and direction of our “adventure” will depend on what nature has to offer us that day, based on weather, and wildlife activity. This part of the day will often build on seasonal themes such as how animals prepare for winter, building our Forest camp, cooking over a fire, or practicing our nature observation skills.

12:00-12:20 – Lunch time

12:20-1:00 – Our afternoons are a time for the preschoolers to directly guide their learning. We'll revisit their favorite spot at mossy rocks, tell imaginative stories about animals of the forest, meet forest friends through a puppet show, or make natural crafts.

1:00 – Pick up

Policies & Procedures

Bathrooms: We have bathroom facilities inside our main office building, within sight of both the Education Barn and our forest camp. The water from the tap is potable. Please make use of these facilities upon arrival: use the bathroom, wash hands, and fill water bottle as needed. Children must be potty trained in order to participate in forest preschool.

Inclement Weather Plan: In the case of severe weather, we will shift activities to our indoor space, the Education Barn. This space will always be set up in advance to accommodate the

Forest Preschool group. In rare cases, a severe weather forecast might require cancellation of a program date, in which case participants would be refunded the fee for that portion of programming.

Gear List

All participants must bring:

- Outdoor clothing*
- Change of clothes (in bag or bin)
- Peanut-free, protein-rich snack
- Water bottle (leak-proof)
- Backpack to carry snack and extra clothing layers
- Mess kit: a cup for warm liquids, a bowl, a spork or other utensil (all must be labeled!)

*The following clothing will be required:

- Winter coat (insulated and water resistant)
- Snow pants
- Boots (mud boots for wet season, insulated for snow season)
- Rain pants
- Rain jacket with a hood
- Hat
- Gloves or mittens
- Neck warmer or scarf
- Socks (wool or fleece)
- Long underwear top and bottom
- Wool sweater or fleece top

Whatever the children are not wearing can be stored in their backpacks. A full change of clothes can also be left inside the Education Barn, in a bag or bin. All items should be labeled with your child's name.

Meet the Teachers

Debbie Archer, lead instructor and Early Childhood Education Specialist: After spending 3 years teaching outdoor education on the west coast in Alaska and Southern California, Debbie made a happy return to the east coast, joining the education team at the Green Mountain Audubon Center in 2015. With a M.S. in Environmental Science and experience as an educator, naturalist, and camp program manager, she has a passion for getting kids outside into nature and won't flinch at the opportunity to howl like a coyote or sign a song about a hippopotamus. She knows the importance of having the opportunity to have hands-on learning experiences where

everything from the development of social skills to math thinking can occur. If Debbie was an animal, she would be a Musk Ox because they are the unicorns of the north.

Jamie Montague, Education Manager: Jamie is a native of New Hampshire and has traveled the world looking for a place that resonates as home. In fall 2015, she moved back to New England with her husband and daughter and is thrilled to be living in Vermont and sharing Audubon's 255 acres of nature with curious forest preschoolers. Her ideal day is spent exploring and learning with children, using nature as a guide. Jamie thrives on the challenge of inspiring others to be stewards of the environment and gets particularly excited about maple syrup and fall colors! In her free time you will find her running, hiking, and biking with family, knitting Icelandic sweaters, and baking her way through old-fashioned cook books.

Emily Kaplita, AmeriCorps Member, Environmental and Outreach Educator: Emily is from Connecticut, but is extremely excited to spend the next year in Vermont at the Green Mountain Audubon Center as an AmeriCorps member. She graduated in May 2016 with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Biology from Dickinson College. This past summer Emily had the pleasure of being a seasonal educator here at the Green Mountain Audubon Center working with the summer day camps and loved it. She cannot wait to learn and teach more here at Audubon. In her free time you will find Emily hiking, spending time with family and friends, baking and cooking more than she can eat, occasionally rock climbs, spending as much time in or near the Huntington River, and enjoys yoga. If Emily could be one animal for the rest of her life she would be a sea otter.

Contact Information

For more information, please contact:

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Check out the Forest Preschool Blog!

<http://greenmountainaudubon.wordpress.com>

