



GREEN MOUNTAIN **Audubon**
CENTER



**Audubon Forest Playschool
Parent Handbook**

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Description & Location

Audubon Forest Playschool 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 at the Education Barn, from which the group travels to their forest base camp. 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.

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 4-hour program.

Program Philosophy

The Forest Playschool 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 as much time outdoors as possible. 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 Playschool 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, color, and more. Games and spontaneous play will be woven throughout each day.
- **Plan for spontaneity:** Our day is child-led. During morning meeting students are given the opportunity to decide what we do and where we go. Our teachers will be ready

with a theme, story, and activity of the day in their back pocket, but we won't hesitate to adjust 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 options at Forest Playschool. This could mean climbing a rock or balancing on a log. 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 Playschool.

Daily Schedule

- 9:00- 9:30 – Drop-off and get ready for the day at the Education Barn. Parents welcome to stay for first 30 minutes. Playschoolers should use this time to pack their bags, use the bathroom, and fill water bottles. We will encourage students to do this themselves to develop self-preparedness, but of course we will be on hand to help and do backpack checks.
- 9:30--Head outside to forest camp (our special spot in the woods behind the office) for the day where we will do morning meeting and play/hike. We want to make sure we have enough time to do some serious adventuring which means we will leave promptly at 9:30.
- After getting to forest camp and having some time to play we will have morning meeting, snack, and story.
- Then we are off on our adventure. That might mean staying at Forest Camp to rebuild the fort or hiking down to Peeper Pond to have lunch and look for frogs!
- We have lunch around 11:30/12
- We will end each day with our Thank You circle where we express any gratitude that we might be feeling.
- 1:00 Pick-up at the Barn.

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. We also work on basic numeracy and alphabet familiarity through nature-based activities and games.

We've recently integrating cooking our own food over the fire. We've made muffins in an orange peel, baked apples in foil, and other delicious creations that are easy for preschoolers to help create, cook, and eat!

Policies & Procedures

Bathrooms: We have bathroom facilities inside our main office building, within sight of both the Education Barn and 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 playschool.

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 Playschool group. In rare cases, a severe weather forecast might require cancellation of a program date. Our Education Program Coordinator will be in touch in the case of a cancellation. We will follow the school cancellation schedule for Snow Days of Brewster Pierce Elementary School which is in the Mt Mansfield Modified Union/Chittenden-East Supervisory Union.

Gear List

All participants must bring:

- Outdoor clothing*
- Change of clothes (in bag or bin)
- Protein-rich snack (we will notify families at the start of the session if it should be nut free)
- Water bottle (leak-proof)
- Backpack to carry snack and extra clothing layers
- A cup to hold warm liquids such as tea around our fire

*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

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.** Extra layers can be put in their backpack for the day.

Meet the Teachers

Debbie Archer, Education Program Coordinator: 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.

Emily Kaplita, Teacher Naturalist: Emily is from Connecticut, and spent 2016 and 2017 serving as an AmeriCorps member on Audubon Vermont's education team. She is now working with Audubon full time as a teacher naturalist. Emily graduated in May 2016 with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Biology from Dickinson College. Emily had the pleasure of being a seasonal educator here at the Green Mountain Audubon Center, working with the summer day camps and loving it. She loves learning about all the special spots of Audubon – there's so many that it takes years to learn them all! 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.

Seasonal Interns/Volunteers: An intern or volunteer might also work with an Audubon Vermont staff member to teach Forest Playschool. Volunteers who work with students are vetted and must pass a background check before they can count towards our adult:child ratio. Most volunteers or interns are using this opportunity to gain hands-on learning about environmental education or want to continue working in education in some capacity.

Contact Information

For more information, please contact:

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Online

Web: <http://vt.audubon.org/programs/forest-play-school>

Blog: [http://vt.audubon.org/Forest PreK Blog](http://vt.audubon.org/Forest_PreK_Blog)