



Playful Nature Explorers



Parent Handbook 2019 - 2020

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Welcome to Playful Nature Explorers

...carrot tops poke out of rich brown soil, honey bees pollinate and provide delicious nectar to sweeten our tea, and eyes sparkle with curiosity and wonder.



Welcome to Playful Nature!

Ithaca Children's Garden's very own outdoor preschool program.

ICG's Playful Nature Explorers is research-based, child-centered, and brings a world of discovery, learning, and joy to your child's day and season through nature and play immersion.

Like learning a new language, building a relationship with the natural world is best when started young. Play is the universal language of childhood!

While Playful Nature Explorers is based at Ithaca Children's Garden, the new ICG Education Outpost at the [Just Be Cause Center](#) (a lovely 10 minute stroll from Ithaca Children's Garden along the Cayuga Waterfront Trail)

provides a delightful indoor retreat in inclement weather.

Following the rhythm of the seasons, our play-based curriculum allows the natural curiosity of young children to lead our explorations, experiments, and creative expressions.

At Ithaca Children's Garden we believe that all children deserve a vibrant, nature rich childhood that models and fosters respect for self, others, and our magnificent world.

Our Mission, Values & Curriculum



It is our mission at Ithaca Children's Garden to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards.

Research suggests that one of the best ways to grow environmental stewardship is through meaningful, child-led outdoor play. It is through play that children develop a relationship with the natural world. It is that relationship that propels them to care for the environment throughout their lifetime.

At ICG, children get the absolute best: Opportunities for authentic child-led free play, with expert mentorship and care. We understand that children who have rich and numerous opportunities for play in childhood are better prepared for life's challenges with social and physical competencies, problem-solving skills, self-awareness, and academic success. Our curriculum is shaped accordingly. We apply Playwork Principles (<http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples>) in the design of our garden and with the stages and ages we work with.

Playful Nature follows ICG's unique garden and play-based curriculum. Snack and Circle Time provide opportunities to build community. Sharing time, conversations, story-telling, singing, and gross motor activities such as dancing, yoga, games, and parachute play are some of the ways we weave our community of young learners together.

The rhythm of the seasons inform our thematic activities. These short enrichment activities respond to children's interests and focus on seasonally relevant topics. Art, science, cooking, gardening, exploration and games are some of the ways we explore these topics.

Children might become a family of squirrels and gather acorns, or go on a scavenger hunt for fall leaves to make collages. We will do science experiments with snow, ice, and water, soil and seeds, and all kinds of plant material to learn more about our world. We'll make soup and bread together and build Worm Motels.

And we'll do all of it with the unique needs of our community of learners at the center.



Our Team



Mara NewRoots, Early Childhood Educator

Mara has worked with children for 20 years in a variety of settings. She brings her deep experience as an educator, mother, naturalist and human service worker to working with children at ICG as Assistant Director of preschool camp and Lead Educator of Playful Nature Garden Preschool. She feels there is nothing more exciting than being outside exploring nature with children.

mara@ithacachildrengarden.org



Doga Tekin, Playful Nature Assistant

Doga is a fun gal who loves fungi. She grew up in Turkey and many of her most memorable childhood experiences are from playing in nature and farms in her grandparents' village. Here's a fun fact: her name, pronounced 'Doe-ah,' means nature in Turkish! She eventually ended up in the U.S. and here she acquired an everlasting admiration of fungi. Doga graduated from Cornell with minors in Mycology and Education and has taught about fungi and lead foraging trips for all ages in the Ithaca and

surrounding areas. Her favorite thing about Ithaca Children's Garden is that it gives kids an opportunity to explore and develop a relationship with nature through collaboration.



Lauren Salzman, Outreach Educator

Lauren has more than ten years of experience leading educational programming with nonprofits, nature centers, museums and community organizations. She received a Master's in Education from a unique program at Western Washington University in conjunction with the North Cascades Institute focusing on leadership and field-based, experiential learning. She also loves all animals, walking

in the woods, playing big games, sitting quietly by a fire, being outside in the wind, rain, snow, heat and everything in between.

As an avid naturalist, Lauren has always loved plants and studying the natural world. With her own roots growing deeply in Ithaca soil, Lauren is thrilled to be part of Ithaca Children's Garden team, making meaningful and magical connections between local youth and the natural world. lauren@ithacachildrengarden.org



Leigh MacDonald-Rizzo, Education Director

Leigh has been with Ithaca Children's Garden and Cornell Cooperative Extension since 1999. Her collection of wide-ranging interests have, at their core, the magic of childhood and wonder of the natural world.

After studying horticulture at Cornell, Leigh focused her master's work on environmental education in public garden settings. Leigh believes wholeheartedly in the connection between environmental stewardship and meaningful time in nature during childhood. Her work at ICG allows a unique blend of fostering outdoor, child-led free play and hands-on, multidisciplinary exploration of the natural world. After 20 years of developing and leading education programs for Ithaca Children's Garden, Leigh feels ICG's focus on permaculture and playwork lay the foundation for the next generation of environmental stewards.

With 3 young boys of her own, Leigh knows what kids like, and loves to deliver it through program innovation, design, and evaluation. leigh@ithacachildrengarden.org



Erin Martea, Executive Director

Erin is deeply inspired by Permaculture ethics and principles and is always looking for ways to integrate permaculture philosophy into all aspects of ICG, from education and landscape management to organizational structure. She is an advocate for playwork and the importance of real play in children's lives for social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development, and is delighted to support Playful Nature Explorers. She always welcomes your comments and feedback.

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Daily Schedule & Drop-Off / Pick-Up

Most days, drop off and pick up will be at Ithaca Children's Garden. During the winter months or in case of heavy rain we may start or end our day at our indoor space at the Just Be Cause Center. We will communicate to families when a change in pick up or drop off is approaching.

While our day-to-day activities will be informed by the season, weather, and the interests of the children, we will maintain a familiar rhythm in our days:

Arrival 8:50-9:00am

sensory bins and favorite books available while we wait for our friends

Snack

*we will visit the bathroom and wash our hands prior to snack
conversations and sharing are prompted while we enjoy food together*

Circle Time

a chance for story, song, games and sharing

Thematic Exploration or Activity

a treasure hunt, making art, cooking, gardening...hands-on, simple, and engaging

Play, play, and more play!

Authentic child-directed outdoor free play across our magical 3 acres

Goodbyes 12:00-12:10pm

Is Playful Nature the right fit for my child?

Playful Nature welcomes ages 2.5-6. We request that all Explorers are day time potty positive. We understand that occasional accidents happen and they will be handled with kindness and respect.

Because of our qualified staff, individualized attention and the nature of our child-centered curriculum, we are often a terrific fit for children with a rainbow of temperaments and experiences. However it is always in the best interest of your child to talk with Leigh or Mara about any concerns you have about special needs or accommodations that will help your child thrive ahead of time.

We welcome both parents and children to visit Playful Nature prior to beginning the program. We are happy to accommodate a gradual transition to independence, especially among our younger explorers.



What to Bring: Fall, Winter, Spring

Set your child up for success!

Each day your child will need:

- a backpack
- 2 complete changes of clothes (including socks and underwear) in labeled gallon-size ziploc bags
- a hearty, healthy snack (playing outside makes your child hungry!)
- a water bottle
- shoes or boots that can get muddy and wet
- seasonally appropriate outerwear

We will be outside in all seasons and virtually all weather. For children to enjoy their time, they must be appropriately dressed to stay warm and dry.

In spring and fall, please dress your child in layers as the temperature can change dramatically over the course of the morning. Waterproof jacket, rain pants, and mud boots are recommended. A hat on sunny or chilly days is helpful.

In winter all children need snow pants, a winter jacket, a hat, mittens, and waterproof snow boots. Scarves and neckwarmers are also a good idea. We recommend you send 2-3 pairs of mittens each day so they can be changed when they get wet.

We recommend dressing in layers to keep children warm and dry during outdoor play:

- a base layer to keep you dry (avoid cotton that absorbs perspiration)
- a mid-layer to keep you warm
- an outer layer to retain heat and protect against rain, snow, & wind.
 - snow pants, winter coat, waterproof snow boots
 - hats, neckwarmer or scarf
 - mittens (2-3 pair)
 - mittens are generally easier for young children to put on independently and keep hands warmer than gloves

Snack

Please send a hearty, nutritious snack and full water bottle each day.

Restrooms

We use the public restrooms next to the large pavilion just north of Ithaca Children's Garden. We also maintain a porta-potty in the Garden that is under lock and key for exclusive use of our preschool program once the public restroom closes later in autumn. This allows us to provide a stool and decor that makes it more comfortable than your average porta potty! We have a lovely restroom facility at the Just Be Cause Center.

Healthy Child Guidelines

Playful Nature is an active, busy, outdoor program. In order to get the most out of the morning together and participate fully, children need to feel well enough to play outside for three hours. Children with fever should remain home for at least 24 after they are free from fever. If your child becomes ill during program we will call you to pick him or her up.



Inclement Weather

Playful Nature will meet at the Just Be Cause Center when the temperatures fall below 10 degrees Fahrenheit including windchill. We will also meet or retreat to Just Be Cause if there is a storm advisory, driving rain, or any other weather situation that our educators feel might compromise the health, safety or wellbeing of our preschool community. ICG staff will be sure to communicate to families the status of where to drop off and pick up your child.

Weather Related Closures

If the Ithaca City School District cancels school due to snow or hazardous weather, Playful Nature Garden Preschool will be cancelled.

If the Ithaca City School District delays opening by one hour, we will open one hour late. If they delay 2 hours, we will cancel program.

Weather related closures are not refunded.

Discipline Philosophy

At Ithaca Children's Garden we model and encourage our young learners to observe three guiding principles:

Take care of yourself * Take care of others * Take care of the environment

With the guidance of our staff and their peers, children develop their understanding of these three principles and how they apply to their words and actions.

Our extensive knowledge and experience in early child development and positive discipline practices allow us to meet children where they are. Staff respond to behavior as developing communication, and work for understanding first, then support each child in practicing skills in a supportive environment.

Financial Policies

In an effort to accommodate busy families variable schedules, Playful Nature Explorers offers flexible enrollment options. Registering by academic year provides a tuition discount. A \$30 application fee is required, which will be applied to your first month's tuition. Once your schedule is confirmed and a tuition agreement signed a deposit equal to one month's tuition is required to reserve your space in the program. It will be applied to your last month's tuition.

Season

Fall (9/10-12/19) Winter (1/6-3/26) Spring (3/30-6/11)

4 day: \$465/month

3 day: \$383/month

2 day: \$297/month

Academic Year (9/9-6/11)

4 day: \$445/month

3 day: \$363/month

2 day: \$277/month

Limited month-to-month options are based on availability

	Register for Academic Year	Register by Season
4 days	\$445/month	\$465/month
3 days	\$363/month	\$383/month
2 days	\$277/month	\$297/month

Once you have registered and you will receive a tuition agreement and a request for deposit. You will be able to choose from the payment options outlined below.

Payment Options:

Recurring Payment:

Set up a recurring payment with your credit or debit card. Your monthly payment will be processed on the first day of the month.

By Check:

You may submit a check at drop off/pick up on the due date.

Scholarship

If you are interested in scholarships, please complete the scholarship application available on our website:

<https://ithacachildrengarden.wufoo.com/forms/qnpl2lh1yrqgod/>

We will review your application and respond within 5 business days.

Refund Policy

Seasonal Explorers:

Should you need to withdraw from the program at any time, 30 days advance notice is required.

Academic Year Explorers

Should you need to withdraw from the program at any time, 60 days advance notice is required.

2019-2020 Program Calendar

September 9 - June 11

9:00am-12:00pm

Fall Term:

September 9 - December 19

Winter Term:

January 6 - March 26

Spring Term:

March 30 - June 11

Holidays & Breaks:

10/14: Indigenous Peoples Day

11/11: Veterans Day

11/27-11/28: Thanksgiving

12/2: Professional Development Day

12/22-1/2: Holiday Recess

1/20: Martin Luther King Day

2/17-2/20: President's Day/Winter Recess

4/6-4/10: Spring Recess

5/25: Memorial Day

