



# Overview

## THE VALUE OF LEARNING WITH NATURE



Cracking open a milkweed pod to release the feathery seeds. Watching a robin tirelessly build its nest. Discovering the

diversity of life housed in a single tree. Experiences like these help children to understand the interconnectedness and beauty of our world. Importantly, these interactions cannot be reproduced indoors, on a computer, or on video. Research shows that children benefit greatly from daily connections with the natural world. And these benefits have a lasting impact, especially when positive outdoor experiences come at an early age. To support educators, families, and administrators with effective resources to help young children connect with nature, the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions

Educational Research Foundation have developed the Nature Explore program. Based on years of Dimensions' research and field testing, each Nature Explore resource can be used alone or in concert to help children make closer connections to nature and develop a lifelong sense of wonder.



## NATURE EXPLORE WORKSHOPS

From the professionals who design effective outdoor learning environments to the educators who apply new strategies and teaching methods, Nature Explore Workshops facilitate professional development and hands-on practical learning.

**For educators:** Nature Explore Workshops offer flexible, site-specific help to educators to bring the benefits of nature into both indoor and outdoor classrooms. Each Nature Explore Workshop provides research-based, field-

tested activities that support comprehensive learning with nature.



**For architects and landscape architects:** Design professionals have a unique opportunity to inspire a child's sense of wonder in the natural world. The *Designing Outdoor Classrooms for Children Workshop* explores effective ways to apply new research-based, field-tested principles to the design of outdoor classrooms for elementary schools, parks, botanic gardens, children's museums, childcare centers, private homes, and other public spaces.

A Collaborative Project of

 **Arbor Day Foundation**  
arborday.org

 **DIMENSIONS**  
Educational Research Foundation  
dimensionsfoundation.org

## CREATE A NATURE EXPLORE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

Research shows that positive experiences with nature improve a child's creative, observation, and motor skills. Nature Explore Classrooms bring those experiences into outdoor spaces at elementary schools, early education programs, parks, and other community sites, providing the means to incorporate the outdoors into meaningful learning. In these spaces, children instinctively interact with natural

components, and gain important learning skills as they play. Each Certified Nature Explore Classroom will become part of a network of schools and programs committed to making nature part of children's daily lives.



## NATURE EXPLORE DESIGN CONSULTATION



On-site design consultations with a specially trained landscape architect-educator team are available to help create Nature Explore Classrooms nationwide. This team will work closely with the school or organization that is constructing the site to develop a concept plan for the space based on field-tested principles while customizing the classroom to meet the school's or organization's needs. This two-day process is an efficient way to help everyone in the organization come to consensus.

## BECOME A CERTIFIED NATURE EXPLORE CLASSROOM

Nature Explore Classroom Certification recognizes outdoor learning spaces created using the three certification standards presented in the *Learning With Nature Idea Book*:

1. Well-designed Outdoor Space;
2. Staff Development; and
3. Family Involvement.

Through certification, educators, families, and others form a national network for idea-sharing, peer support, and continuous learning and development. Certification offers many benefits to a school or organization that designs or redesigns an outdoor space based on guiding principles described in the *Learning With Nature Idea Book*:

- Certified classrooms join a growing network of schools and organizations committed to reconnecting children with nature.
- A specially designated Nature Explore Classroom Web site will offer access to the latest news and research on children and nature while providing a place to share ideas.
- Upon certification, the Arbor Day Foundation will send a press release to your local media to stir interest and awareness and potential for fundraising.





## LEARNING WITH NATURE IDEA BOOK

Providing comprehensive guidance, the *Learning With Nature Idea Book: Creating Nurturing Outdoor Spaces for Children* shares field-tested principles for effective outdoor learning environments with educators and builders who are designing or redesigning

an outdoor classroom. The *Learning With Nature Idea Book* has practical ideas that incorporate concepts from Dimensions' research and leading ASLA designers with colorful illustrations and photos.

## THE NATURE EXPLORE SOURCEBOOK

The *Nature Explore Sourcebook* lets educators, administrators, and communities easily order field-tested natural components for outdoor learning. From precision-cut tree blocks to natural surfaces, educators and developers can quickly see how an outdoor classroom with natural components is a fun, creative way to connect children with nature.



*This is one example of a Nature Explore Classroom using some of the natural materials available in the Nature Explore Sourcebook.*

## TRAVELING EXHIBIT

The "Exploring Trees Inside and Out" Traveling Exhibit helps children discover nature through multiple perspectives and inspires them to get outdoors and develop personal connections with the natural world. Children get a glimpse of the wonders that await them in their own backyards and neighborhoods through this interactive exhibit's multi-sensory and innovative visual-spatial experiences. Sponsored by Doubletree Hotels, the Exhibit travels around the country through 2010.



## NATURE EXPLORE RESOURCE MATERIALS

Getting children outside is just the first step in nature education. While children learn a great deal exploring their natural surroundings, deeper learning involves interpreting what they see, touch, and smell, and

synthesizing this information to construct meaning. Learning to make sense of what one sees does not “just happen.” Children need adult guidance to develop better observation skills, visual memory, and the ability to

learn math, science, and literacy concepts from their interactions with nature. These Nature Explore Resources guide educators and parents in using the natural world as an integral and effective part of children’s daily learning.

### NATURE IMAGE CARDS AND POSTERS and DVDs

Nature Image Cards and Posters are colorful, hands-on resource materials that help children develop observation skills, strengthen math, science and language learning, and pay more attention to the wonder of the

world around them. Nature Explore DVDs will inspire educators, administrators, and families to adopt research-tested methods that use nature as an integral part of children’s learning.



### NATURE EXPLORE CLUB

Three versions of the Nature Explore Club are available to help educators or families provide children with meaningful and positive experiences with nature.

A mix of activities engage children through all seasons, helping make nature part of their daily lives.

### NATURE EXPLORE CLUB Educator Edition

Nature Explore Club Educator Edition is a fun and affordable resource for educators to use in supporting interactive outdoor learning. The field-tested outdoor activities combine literature with science to enhance children’s

observation and problem-solving skills as they have fun connecting with the wonders of nature. A valuable home-school connection can be fostered if families also use the Home Edition materials.



### NATURE EXPLORE CLUB Home Edition

Nature Explore Club Home Edition is designed for parents, grandparents, and other adults to enhance their bonds with the

children in their lives and bring them closer to nature. Materials include exciting colorful stories, outdoor adventure activities

to share with an adult, and clever “explorer’s tools” to make connecting with nature more fun and hands-on. Ages 3-8.

### NATURE EXPLORE FAMILIES’ CLUB

The Nature Explore Families’ Club includes research-based, field-tested resources designed to help organize a Families’ Club at a school or other organization. The

Families’ Club kit is packed full of easy to use, age-appropriate activities shown to engage families in exploring the natural world together.

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