The Cincinnati Playscape Initiative:

promoting play in nature for all children in Greater Cincinnati

About the Partners

Cincinnati Nature Center’s mission is to promote passion for nature and inspire environmentally responsible choices through experience, education and stewardship to ensure a sustainable future.

The Arlitt Child and Family Research and Education Center’s mission is to research, demonstrate and promote best practices in early childhood care and education.

Endorsed by

Contact us...

...for information and programs on nature play and ways to facilitate nature play.
...for names of local landscape designers trained in nature play design.
...for connections to other organizations and educators interested in nature play.

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The problem

Children are spending far less time exploring nature than their parents did.

The solution

- To form a partnership between CNC and UC/Arlitt to educate the community about the importance of nature play.
- To build two nature playscapes for use by Cincinnati Nature Center and UC/Arlitt as demonstrations for the community.
- To train local designers on natural playscape design.
- To provide a venue for research on children’s interactions with nature.
- To ensure that every child in the Greater Cincinnati community has a place to safely play outdoors.

Background

New York Times’ Best Seller, Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder by Richard Louv presents the research showing the critical importance of nature play for healthy child development.

Due to parental fear, electronic media, scheduled activities and pressure for higher test scores, children are not playing outside as much as previous generations. In addition, the prevalence of overweight children is increasing (Clements, 2004; Ogden, Flegal, Carroll, & Johnson, 2002). However, research indicates that unstructured play in nature increases self-esteem, creativity, motor skills, fitness and academic performance. It also has been shown to relieve symptoms of ADHD (Wells & Evans, 2003; Juo & Faber Taylor, 2003).

Studies published in the Journal of Pediatrics indicate 70 percent of American children do not get enough Vitamin D, and they are more likely to have higher blood pressure, high blood sugar levels and low levels of good cholesterol in their blood. Fortified foods, fish and egg yolks are good sources, but according to the studies, most kids don’t get enough from their diets alone; what they need is more time in the sun, an excellent source of Vitamin D.

How do Nature Playscapes Differ from Traditional Playgrounds?

1. Materials are available for open-ended creative play, not designed to be used in pre-determined, specific ways.
2. Nature is the focus, not human-made elements.
3. Plants, soil and water are integrated and available to be touched and manipulated, not just observed.
4. Natural materials are used to provide opportunities for children to climb logs, dig in the dirt, build, play in water, participate in dramatic play and experience the wonders of nature.