



Nature School Family Handbook

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Questions? Contact us at preschool@bookwormgardens.org

Statement of Purpose

The Bookworm Gardens Nature School is a program through the Education Department of Bookworm Gardens and thus shares the mission to "inspire the love of books and nature in the young and young at heart." Using nature as a catalyst for learning, we aim to foster a sense of wonder through play and inquiry-based exploration.

Bookworm Gardens

Bookworm Gardens is a non-profit botanic garden inspired by children's literature and located in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Our mission is to inspire the love of books and nature in the young and young at heart. There are over 75 books represented in the Gardens, each with a corresponding laminated book to read and enjoy. We offer experiences for general admission to explore the grounds as well as special events, summer camps, classes, and field trips. The 20+ staff members of Bookworm Gardens work in close collaboration with our board of directors to support our vision to provide *whimsical garden experiences by bringing children's literature to life.*

Nature School Core Values

Bookworm Gardens Nature School values:

- Play As Learning
- Seasonal Exploration
- Respect for the Natural World
- Hands-on Discovery

Bookworm Gardens Nature School believes in providing an environment that encourages discovery, experimentation, and the opportunity to see the results of one's actions. We encourage divergent thinking and reflection by asking open-ended questions and providing information in response to children's ideas, insights, and concerns. Appreciating the individuality of children and celebrating their uniqueness is important to us. We feel this can be accomplished by building positive relationships with the people and places we encounter in our daily lives, which in turn strengthen our sense of belonging in a community. A fluid curriculum that is driven by children's current interests is what our learning experiences are centered around.

What is a Nature School?

To be considered a nature-based preschool, nature must be at the heart of the program. While nature-based preschools have the same child development goals as any other high quality preschool, the curriculum and teachers achieve these developmental goals through nature-based experiences. A nature-based preschool provides children with special opportunities to learn about the natural world, while also providing daily opportunities for personal growth and achievement. By connecting young children with the natural world, we hope to inspire a love of nature, foster an environmental ethic, and encourage a caring attitude that will follow each child throughout their life.

A Note on Risky Play

At Bookworm Gardens Nature School, students will be exposed to age-appropriate risk through lessons and free play. Learning how to take appropriate risks helps children gain independence, confidence, motor skills and decision-making skills. Age-appropriate risks students might take include walking along fallen logs and using natural items like sticks while playing.

Hazardous situations will be monitored and controlled by teachers at all times. Hazards include sharp branches at eye level, dangerous weather, or ice. For more information about why we choose to embrace risky play in our program, see our “Recommended Reading” document.

Parents + Guardians Must Understand and Agree That:

- We go outside rain or shine, and in temperatures as low as negative one degree Fahrenheit. See our weather policy below for specifics.
- It is the parent or guardian’s responsibility to be aware of the weather and dress their child in the appropriate clothing and gear for the child to be comfortable outside.
- Children will get wet and muddy, often requiring changes of clothing.
- While we always do our best to return your child in perfect condition, your child may occasionally experience small scrapes, scratches, bumps, and bruises.
- Your child must be dropped off within the assigned drop off window. Perpetual lateness disrupts your child’s learning experience, impacts the entire class and interferes with teachers’ abilities to plan and prepare.
- You can support your learner by following school guidelines, deadlines, and calendars updates
- Report all student absences by email to preschool@bookwormgardens.org
- Parents and guardians are expected to supervise their children if playing on the Bookworm Gardens grounds both before drop-off and after pick-up
- Young children who are new to social situations may experience conflict. This can be stressful, but it is also an important part of learning how to interact with others. Educators in the Nature School will be there to guide and support children as they navigate different social interactions.
- Students will be prepared to learn by their grown ups. This includes students coming to drop off with sunscreen/bug spray applied, bathroom used, and appropriate outside play clothing already on.
- While Bookworm Gardens’ staff has set rules and guidelines for the Nature School program, the teachers are given the right to make educated, thoughtful, and purposeful decisions about individual scenarios that they feel are in the best interest of the child and/or program, even if it may go outside of the set Nature School rules and guidelines. **This will only be utilized if it is more beneficial for the child(ren) if the guidelines/rules are altered for that particular scenario.** For example, if it is winter and sunny outside and all the children are comfortable, happy and learning, we may continue to stay outside for our learning if the temperature is lower than our guidelines. We will revert back to following the prescribed guidelines at the first sign of someone in the program being negatively affected by a situation that occurs outside of our guidelines.

Expectations for Adults (including parents, guardians, volunteers, teachers, and staff):

Our goal at Bookworm Gardens Nature School is to create an environment in which everyone is able to achieve an atmosphere of kindness, understanding, and respect. The following is an outline of expectations for the adults in our school who work together in support of the children. We expect everyone to:

- Treat one another with courtesy
- Set good examples for children in terms of speech and behavior
- Go through the proper channels of communication when problems arise (this includes talking first with the Nature School Present Director and/or the classroom teachers regarding any classroom concerns, then with the Director of Education & Community Programming if necessary)
- Maintain confidentiality

Additionally, Bookworm staff are expected to use developmentally appropriate practice in their teaching and maintain their level of expertise through continuing education experiences.

Photo/Video Release

A photo release form is required for enrollment. This agreement allows Bookworm Gardens to use images of your child for educational and marketing purposes, including on print publications, our website, and social media. If photos of your child are used, they will never be identified by name. On the photo release, you can accept or deny Bookworm Gardens permission to take photos of your child.

Social Media Policy

Remember that online posts and social media conversations are not private. Even with the strictest privacy settings, you should consider any post you make to be a part of the public domain. We expect our entire preschool community to abide by the following rules regarding social media:

- Do not share confidential information, internal school discussions, or personal and specific information about students, parents, teachers, or staff on social media sites.
- Do not post photos that identify any of our preschool children by name, or that show individual child faces, without prior permission from that child's parents or guardians.
- Keep any criticisms you may have of the school or its members respectful. Comments should be constructive rather than hurtful. If you have any criticisms, it is expected that you will talk directly to the staff at Bookworm Gardens about the criticism and work out a solution before posting anything on social media.
- We recognize that some of our teachers and parents are very comfortable maintaining friendships on social media, while others may choose to decline friendship requests on sites such as Facebook while your child is enrolled in the school. This is a professional choice and should not be taken personally.

Days of Operation

School will be in session September - May with classes operating on **Tuesday and Thursday mornings between 9a.m. and 12p.m.** The first and last 30 minutes of the school day will be devoted to open-ended learning. Students are free to be dropped off and picked up anytime within the 30 minute window.

- 9:00 - 9:30 AM Drop-off Window + Exploration Time
- 9:30 - 11:30 AM Dedicated Class Time
- 11:30 AM - 12:00 PM Pick-up Window + Exploration Time

Pick up / Drop off Procedure

Because Bookworm Gardens is open to the general public May 1 - October 31, the drop off and pick up procedure will change throughout the year depending on if the Gardens are open to the public or not.

- September and October: Park in the Bookworm Gardens parking lot and walk down to the Secret Garden, entering through the front gate for both drop off and pick up. On Tuesdays, the grounds are closed for general exploration (open only to program participants). On Thursdays, the Gardens are open from 10 AM - 4 PM. You can choose to stay and explore as a family if you'd like.
- November - April: You may either park in the Bookworm Gardens parking lot and walk down to the Secret Garden, or you may temporarily park by the front gate and/or the parking spots designated as "bus parking" while you drop off / pick up your child. During these months, families will have access to the Giving Tree Circle, Learning Cottage Restrooms, and entrance paths only. Learners who are accompanied by staff will explore the full Gardens during class time, but families must remain in these designated pick up and drop off areas while the Gardens are closed to the public.
- May: Park in the Bookworm Gardens parking lot and walk down to the Secret Garden, entering through the front gate for both drop off and pick up. On Tuesdays, the grounds are closed for general exploration (open only to program participants). On Thursdays, the Gardens are open from 10 AM - 4 PM. You can choose to stay and explore as a family if you'd like.

Absences

If your child will be absent from school for any reason, contact the teacher prior to the start of class. You can contact the preschool director via email. Email: preschool@bookwormgardens.org. If class has been in session for 60 minutes and we have not heard from you, we will attempt to contact you.

Daily Schedule (to be adjusted as needed)

- 9:00 - 9:30 Exploration stations and drop off
- 9:30 - 9:45 Welcome song/announcements and calendar activities
- 9:45 -10:15 Class hike and exploration
- 10:15 -10:45 Snack & Story time
- 10:45 - 11:15 Small group activities
- 11:15 - 11:30 End of day meeting
- 11:30 - 12:00 Exploration stations and pick up

Transportation

Bookworm Gardens does not have any form of transportation to get your child to and from programming. Families are responsible for dropping off and picking up your child from class at the designated times. If you are unable to pick up your child, only those who are listed as “Authorized persons” on the “Child Enrollment and Health History” form will be allowed to leave the Gardens with your child. If you need to add an authorized pick up person, email preschool@bookwormgardens.org with the name and contact information of the person who will be picking up your child. Ask the person who will be picking up to bring a form of identification with them, as we will check it.

Staffing

We maintain a ratio of 8:1 in our classrooms, with a class limit of 16 children and 2 teachers. Our teachers have a range of experiences, including degrees and/or teaching backgrounds in early childhood education, special education, working with people on the autism spectrum, museum education, anthropology, art education, art history, environmental sciences, botany, biology, horticulture, creative writing, and speech pathology.

We regularly attend conferences about nature-based early childhood education; participate in team building activities; and attend naturalist trainings. All staff have completed Child Abuse and Neglect and Abusive Head Trauma training. All Bookworm Gardens staff maintain Infant and Child CPR and First Aid certification and are trained on proper response in a fire or weather-related emergency.

The Nature School does not endorse or recommend staff to parents (or parents to staff) for child care outside of preschool hours (babysitting) and is not liable for the conduct of the parent or the staff who enter into a private care arrangement.

Behavior Management

Optimal learning occurs when there is freedom for discovery, enough structure to allow everyone to learn, and physical and emotional safety. To maintain this atmosphere, we have designed our school day to provide children with ample room and equipment. Conflicts are generally avoided when there is enough to go around. In addition, the daily program will be structured to provide enough time for children to feel satisfied in play.

We will also provide an extended period of outdoor play. This allows children to expend the wonderful energy of this age group in appropriate ways. Adults will be available to help children solve social problems. For example, some children need encouragement to stand up for their rights with other children. Some children need to be taught the language and skills necessary for dealing with issues such as sharing. Adults will serve as models and facilitate the resolution of disputes. We put a lot of emphasis on the art of redirection as a primary attempt at a resolution. Any major, or long-term situations with children that may require frequent intervention will be dealt with by having conversations with the child's family, where we decide on a plan together as a team.

Sick Policy

While we hope that your child stays as healthy as possible during their time at Nature School, it is likely that sickness may occur at some point throughout the year. At Bookworm Gardens we believe that both children and staff should not be at the Gardens if they are feeling unwell. This is for the health and safety of all persons involved. Your child should stay home if they are experiencing the following:

- Fever
- Rash of any kind that has not been looked at by a physician
- Continuous coughing or productive coughing
- Constant running nose
- Nasal discharge that is not clear
- Vomiting or upset stomach
- Diarrhea
- An infectious disease
- Sore throat
- Any symptom that is causing them persistent discomfort

You will be notified if your child has been exposed to any contagious illnesses. We request that you inform the Nature School staff if your child has been exposed to or has contracted any contagious illnesses.

Children can return to Nature School once they've been symptom free for 24 hours without medications. If staff notice any of these symptoms and suspect a contagious illness or a high level of discomfort in your child, the parent/guardian will be notified immediately and will be asked to pick up the child. If the parent/guardian does not respond to communication within 15 minutes, the emergency contact will be notified.

COVID-19 Policy

Bookworm Gardens has continued to learn and adapt to Covid-19, always keeping the health and safety of its employees, visitors and learners in mind. We will continue to follow local health guidelines regarding masks, physical distancing, and spending as much time outside as possible. We are expecting parents to assess the health of their child prior to class. If your child or a member of your household tests positive, please notify us via email. Parents will be notified if their child has been exposed to Covid-19.

Parents are expected to assess the health of their child before coming to Nature School. Do not send your child to Nature School if:

- your child or someone in your household has Covid-19 or has a possible recent exposure
- your child or another household member is awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test
- your child has a fever. Fever reducing medication may not be used when determining a child's health. Children must be fever-free for 48 hours before returning to nature school, per the recommendations of the CDC
- your child is experiencing recognizable symptoms of COVID-19, including a fever, dry cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, intense headache, or runny nose

Please follow CDC guidance regarding quarantine / masking if your child tests positive prior to returning to class.

Snacks and Food Safety

Parents will provide a snack and water bottle for the child to have during our mid-morning snack time. We kindly ask that the snack be nutritious and ideally be packed in reusable containers. We do not have guaranteed access to a refrigerator, so do not send any food that requires refrigeration. We will have a small amount of emergency snacks in case your child comes without a snack, however we ask that you not rely on utilizing it.

There may be times when we have a "special" snack. This may look like a cooking activity that we do together as a class, or an exploration of a specific type of food (food grown on Bookworm Gardens grounds, cultural recipes, unique food, etc), or a birthday treat. If you do not wish for your child to eat any food that is not provided by your own household, let us know so that we can contact you and make alternate arrangements for your child when these situations arise.

Additional snack restrictions may be implemented on a case-by-case basis depending on known allergies of children enrolled in the class. Make note of any food allergies on the "Health History and Emergency Care Plan" form, which is a part of the registration paperwork.

Things to Bring to School

Label everything your child brings into Bookworm Gardens Nature School. The most important thing to bring to school each session is the proper attire for the weather. Send your child already dressed, or have items like snow gear, rain gear, hats, sunglasses etc. available for them to put on. You should also send a water bottle and snack with your child for each session. You must provide a set of extra clothes to stay at school for your child. Be sure to send your child with replacement extra clothes if they get sent home in their spare pair. You are responsible for switching out proper sizes of your child's extra clothes stash throughout the year as your child grows.

Things to NOT Bring to School

Leave all personal toys, electronics, etc. at home unless there is a special request by teachers to bring items in. We cannot be held responsible for any lost or damaged toys that are brought from home. If your child has a special item that is used for comfort, speak with the teachers about it. We value the emotional well being of a child and realize that sometimes that includes bringing something familiar from home.

Clothing

The core of our teaching at Nature School is play-based exploration in an outdoor environment. Keeping this in mind, we ask that you dress your child in clothing that is comfortable and not restrictive. Send your child in anything that will hinder them from participating in any kind of play. **WE WILL BE OUTSIDE EVERY DAY**, unless there is severe weather. Send your child in clothes that can get messy. Avoid sending your child in fancy clothes or costumes. Consider how easy it is for your child to take their clothes on and off independently when dressing your child for school, including gear made for the outdoors as well (jackets, coats, hats, mitten, boots, etc.). We want to encourage independence in our students, and the proper clothing will make this much more achievable for them.

Make sure that your child has access to appropriate outdoor clothing for all kinds of weather. Outdoor gear quality does matter! If a child is uncomfortable outside because they do not have the appropriate gear, it affects the whole class, as at least part of the class will have to go inside with your child in order to keep the class in a safe student to teacher ratio. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when gathering your child's outdoor gear:

- When obtaining outdoor gear, try to look for waterproof (not water resistant) snow clothes and boots.
- Layers are great! Feel free to leave a layer or two in the classroom for easy access. We will send the layers home when they are in need of washing.
- Send your child in shoes that have grip on the bottom, and will stay secured to their feet when running and climbing. In the warmer months, sandals with covered toes and back straps are okay, but do not send your child in flip-flops or backless shoes.
- Waterproof rain boots are a great option for a large portion of the year as they are easy to get on and off, and allow children to explore in muddy places, without being fearful of ruining their shoes.

At the beginning of the school year, **send a full set of emergency extra clothes to keep at school. This includes a pair of pants/shorts, a shirt, underwear, socks.** We will send reminders throughout the year to check on your child's extra clothes to make sure it is the correct size and seasonally appropriate.

ALL CLOTHING AND GEAR MUST BE LABELED before coming to school. Label everything including, hats, mittens, boots, scarves, etc. We will have a lost and found basket located in the classroom. There will be classroom clothing items to borrow if needed. If your child gets sent home with something borrowed

from the classroom we ask that you wash it and return it to the classroom. We will have a handout with recommended gear before the school year begins.

The following are clothing needs for each season:

Fall:

Rain Boots w/ Sturdy Socks (not ankle socks)

Jacket or Sweatshirt

Rain Pants and Rain Jacket w/ Hood (provide these on any cool, windy day - not just rainy days - so that your child may sit on damp cold ground or play in water with comfort).

Extra Top Layer (to keep in the classroom, aka sweatshirt, long sleeve shirt, etc.)

Winter:

Scarf or Neck Warmers

Hat

Waterproof Mittens and Gloves

Insulated Boots

Wool or Fleece Socks

Snow Pants and Winter Coat or One-piece Snow Suit

Extra Top Layer (to keep in the classroom, aka sweatshirt, long sleeve shirt, etc.)

Spring:

Rain Boots w/ Sturdy Socks (not ankle socks)

Rain Jacket w/ Hood

Rain Pants

Waterproof Mittens

Extra Top Layer (to keep in the classroom, aka sweatshirt, long sleeve shirt, etc.)

Sunscreen and Bug Spray

Send your child to class prepared for the outdoors by applying sunscreen or bug spray to your child at home before coming to school or applying it outside during drop-off. Send students to school wearing appropriate clothing for the weather that also protects them from the sun. Sunglasses and long-sleeved shirts are encouraged. Students should always be sent to school with a hat if possible. Hats not only provide protection from the sun but also provide protection against ticks (See tick section below for more information).

Plants and Insects

Students will sometimes play off the paths within the Gardens' property. While playing and learning at the Gardens, children may encounter plants such as poison ivy, stinging nettles, other thorny plants, mosquitoes, bees, hornets, other stinging or biting insects, and different types of ticks. All of these are a part of nature; students will learn about them, and staff will guide students in identifying them as they're

playing and learning. Appropriate dress is one way to help avoid uncomfortable encounters with hazardous plants and insects.

In the situation that your child comes into contact with any hazardous plants or insects, staff will contact you immediately if it is an emergency or will inform you at pick-up if it was a minor incident.

Find Poison Ivy information here:

- <https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/poison-ivy/>

Find tick information here:

- https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/removing_a_tick.html
- <https://wisconsin-ticks.russell.wisc.edu/tick-identification-for-public-health-and-medical-professionals/>

Water Safety

Bookworm Gardens' property includes a small pond and access to the Sheboygan River. Children will only be allowed near the water while wearing proper footwear (ex: sneakers, closed-toed sandals, footwear with traction). Children may engage in frog catching using their hands or nets and collecting insects and plants to look at more closely. Two or more adults will always be present if children are interacting with the water.

School Closings + Weather

Bookworm Gardens Nature School will follow the Sheboygan Area School District determination for weather-related closings. We also reserve the right to make our own determinations about holding class based on the weather conditions. When there is a weather-related school closure, we will contact parents by email. We will do our best to make the determination the evening before, or as soon as possible, as we know it can be difficult to find other arrangements for your child on short notice.

We will follow the closures of the Sheboygan Area School District, but will implement some additional routine changes to keep students safe on especially cold days while they are at school. Teachers know their classes well and will always use their best judgment to decide the appropriate amount of time to spend outdoors for each class.

When the real feel temperature is:

- between 0 and -20 classes will spend small amounts of time outdoors, usually no more than 45 minutes.
- between -20 and -39 classes will spend the full class session inside the classroom OR class will be canceled depending on what the best & safest decision is for an individual class or situation
- -40 or colder, classes will always be canceled.

Family Engagement

At Bookworm Gardens Nature School we value and encourage families to participate in their child's class experience. Parents, guardians, or other family members are encouraged to volunteer during class in a

number of ways. If you, or someone you know has any special talents or areas of expertise that you think the children could benefit from seeing/hearing about, let us know!

We can always use an extra set of hands in the classroom! If you're interested in assisting the teachers with day-to-day classroom activities, contact one of the teachers to express your interest. There may, however, be times when we need to limit the number of parents who visit our class in one day. We may also have a parent limit the number of days he or she volunteers if we feel it is preventing the child from fully engaging with his or her classmates.

Celebrations

We believe that life is full of things worth celebrating! Our celebrations include things like children's birthdays or half birthdays, changes in the season, individual student and classroom accomplishments, etc. While we try to downplay the commercial aspects of many traditional/religious holidays, we will celebrate in our own Nature School way! Example: instead of putting the focus solely on Halloween, we will also celebrate the harvest. We know that holidays and celebrations are an important part of our families' lives and cultures. If your family has a cultural celebration that you would like to share with the class, we'd welcome you to discuss the possibility of coming into the classroom and sharing your experiences in class with the teachers.

For student birthday celebrations, families are encouraged to bring in favorite photos of their child to be shared with the class for each year of the child's life, as well as the birthday child's favorite book, which will be read aloud to the class. We hope that the child's grown ups will consider being our guest reader of the child's favorite book on their special day. We will celebrate by gathering around a special birthday sun on the floor and singing a birthday song as the birthday child walks around the sun as many times as they've been around the sun (their age)! Children are welcome to share a special treat with the class, we just ask that the family communicate with the teachers beforehand and make a plan about this.

Tuition and payments

The first payment required for the Nature School is a \$250 non-refundable deposit upon enrolling your child in the program. This deposit will be applied towards the first tuition payment. Tuition payments should be paid electronically. There will be 3 total tuition payments throughout the year. Note that Bookworm Gardens members will receive a 20% discount on tuition.

- March: non-refundable \$250 deposit upon enrollment
- August 15: First half of tuition due
- December 15: Last half of tuition due

If you would like information on our scholarship program please contact the Preschool Director (preschool@bookwormgardens.org).