



KINDERGARTEN • PLAY-BASED LEARNING

Eunoia Forest School

Curriculum

"If you didn't get dirty, you didn't have fun"





Our Philosophy

At Eunoia Forest School, we believe that children learn best when they are free to explore, wonder, and discover in the natural world.

Child-Led Exploration

Our kindergarten program honours the natural curiosity of young learners. Through play-based experiences in nature, children develop foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning, all while building a deep connection with the environment.

The Outdoor Classroom

Rain or shine, our outdoor classroom provides endless opportunities for discovery. The forest becomes a living laboratory where children investigate, create, and grow. We follow the seasons, learning from the rhythms of nature. Yes, we have an indoor classroom when the weather requires it!

Holistic Development

We nurture the whole child: mind, body, and spirit. Through risky play, collaborative projects, and quiet moments of reflection, children develop resilience, empathy, and a love of learning that will serve them throughout their lives.



A Year in the Forest

Our curriculum follows the natural rhythm of the seasons, allowing children to experience the forest's transformation throughout the year.

In Forest School, there is no separation between "learning time" and "play time." Every moment outdoors is an opportunity for discovery, growth, and connection. Our seasonal curriculum provides a framework while honoring each child's unique interests and developmental journey.

Our Forest School Foundations



Child-Led Learning

Children direct their own play and learning, following their natural curiosity and interests.



Regular and Repeated

Consistent time in the same natural space allows deep connection and seasonal understanding.



Risk and Challenge

Appropriate risk-taking builds confidence, resilience, and self-assessment skills.



Community

Learning happens in relationship with peers, adults, and the natural world.



Holistic Development

We nurture physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth together.



Nature Connection

The forest is our teacher. We learn from, with, and about the natural world.



Seasonal Journeys



Fall

September - November

"Harvest and Preparation"

As leaves transform into brilliant colors and fall gently to the forest floor, children discover the magic of nature's transitions. We explore themes of gratitude, preparation, and the interconnectedness of all living things.

Fall teaches children about letting go, preparing for change, and finding beauty in transitions. We honor the harvest and give thanks for the abundance of the forest.



Sample Activities

Leaf identification and pressing

Seed collecting and sorting

Building shelters with fallen branches

Harvest celebrations and gratitude circles

Acorn and pinecone crafts

Spider web observation

Mushroom discovery walks

Composting exploration



Learning and Growth

- Understanding seasonal cycles and animal preparation
- Developing fine motor skills through nature crafts
- Building vocabulary around colors, textures, and change
- Practicing gratitude and community celebration



Winter

December - February

"Rest and Resilience"

Winter invites us to slow down, observe animal tracks in fresh snow, and discover how the forest rests yet remains alive. Children learn resilience as they embrace the cold and find wonder in the quiet season.

Winter teaches children that rest is essential, that beauty exists in stillness, and that we can find comfort and warmth in community even during the coldest days.

★ Sample Activities

Animal tracking and identification

Snow shelter construction

Bird watching and feeding stations

Winter nature journaling

Campfire stories and hot cocoa

Ice exploration and experiments

Evergreen identification

Star gazing on early dark evenings

♥ Learning and Growth

- Building physical resilience and cold-weather confidence
- Understanding animal adaptations and hibernation
- Developing observation and tracking skills
- Fostering storytelling and oral tradition



Spring

March - May

"Renewal and Growth"

The forest awakens with new life, birdsong fills the air, and everywhere we look, something is sprouting, hatching, or returning. Children experience the joy of renewal and the miracle of growth firsthand.

Spring teaches children about new beginnings, patience, and the reward of nurturing growth. We celebrate the return of life and the promise of warmer days ahead.



Sample Activities

Mud kitchen creations

Frog pond visits and tadpole watching

Garden planting and seed starting

Rain collection and water cycle exploration

Bird nest observation

Wildflower identification

Worm composting projects

Spring cleaning of forest spaces



Learning and Growth

- Understanding plant life cycles and growth
- Developing patience through long-term observation
- Exploring cause and effect through planting
- Building empathy through caring for living things



Summer

June - August

"Adventure and Abundance"

Long sunny days invite extended explorations, water play, and adventures deeper into the forest. The abundance of summer provides endless opportunities for discovery, creativity, and joyful outdoor living.

Summer teaches children to embrace adventure, respect the abundance of nature, and understand the importance of sustainable foraging and gentle stewardship.



Sample Activities

Stream and creek exploration

Insect studies and bug hotels

Nature art with flowers and leaves

Foraging basics (berries, herbs)

Extended forest hikes

Cloud watching and weather observation

Tent building and outdoor sleeping

Water experiments and splash play



Learning and Growth

- Developing adventurous spirit and risk assessment
- Understanding ecosystems and food chains
- Building endurance and physical capability
- Fostering creativity through natural art materials

Learning That Grows With the Seasons

Our curriculum is not a checklist to complete, but a living, breathing journey through the natural world. Each child's experience is unique, shaped by their own curiosity, the weather, the wildlife we encounter, and the magic that unfolds when children are free to explore.



Play-Based Learning

"Play is the highest form of research." - Albert Einstein

In Forest School, play is not separate from learning; it IS learning. Through self-directed, open-ended play in nature, kindergarteners develop all the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills they need for lifelong success. Our role as educators is to provide a rich environment, ensure safety, and step back to let children lead their own discoveries.

Forest School Ethos

Child-Led Learning

Children choose their own activities based on their interests and developmental needs. Adults facilitate rather than direct.

Regular & Repeated Access

Learning happens over time through regular visits to the same natural space, building deep familiarity and connection.

All Weather, All Seasons

We go outside in rain, wind, snow, and sun. Each weather condition offers unique learning opportunities.

Nature as the Teacher

The natural environment is the third teacher. We use what the forest provides rather than bringing in artificial materials.

Process Over Product

The journey of exploration matters more than any finished creation. We celebrate effort, curiosity, and discovery.

Holistic Development

Play in nature develops the whole child: physical, emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions together.

☀ Types of Play in the Forest



Loose Parts Play

In the forest, sticks, stones, pinecones, leaves, bark, and seed pods become infinite possibilities. Children develop creativity, spatial awareness, problem-solving skills, and mathematical thinking as they sort, stack, arrange, and transform natural materials.

Forest School Connection: Natural loose parts are open-ended, inviting children to lead their own play narratives and develop intrinsic motivation.

Examples in Practice:

- Building fairy houses and gnome villages

- Creating nature mandalas and land art

- Constructing bridges and dams in streams

- Making potions with petals and water

- Sorting collections by size, color, or texture

- Weaving with grasses and flexible branches



Risky Play

Forest School embraces calculated risk as essential for healthy development. Climbing trees, balancing on logs, navigating uneven terrain, and using real tools teaches children to assess danger, make decisions, build physical confidence, and develop resilience. We follow the principle: 'As safe as necessary, not as safe as possible.'

Forest School Connection: Children who engage in risky play become better at self-regulation, develop stronger proprioceptive awareness, and show reduced anxiety.

Examples in Practice:

- Tree climbing with increasing heights
- Balancing on fallen logs and stumps
- Supervised tool use (saws, knives, mallets)
- Playing near fire circles with clear boundaries
- Jumping from heights onto soft ground
- Navigating slopes and rough terrain



Imaginative & Dramatic Play

The forest becomes whatever children imagine: a dragon's lair, a pirate ship, a hospital for injured animals, or a restaurant serving mud pies. Through pretend play, children develop language, social negotiation skills, emotional understanding, theory of mind, and narrative thinking.

Forest School Connection: Natural settings provide rich, multi-sensory backdrops that enhance imaginative play far beyond indoor environments.

Examples in Practice:

- Forest kitchen and mud pie café

- Animal roleplay (becoming foxes, owls, deer)

- Story creation and acting out tales

- Building dens as homes, castles, or caves

- Nature superhero adventures

- Caring for 'baby' pinecones or acorn families



Sensory & Messy Play

Mud between toes, rain on faces, the smell of pine needles, the texture of moss. Multi-sensory experiences in nature support brain development, emotional regulation, and help children feel grounded and calm. We embrace all weather as 'good weather for learning.'

Forest School Connection: Research shows nature-based sensory experiences reduce cortisol levels and support children with sensory processing differences.

Examples in Practice:

- Mud play: digging, sculpting, printing

- Water exploration in puddles and streams

- Texture hunts across bark, leaves, stones

- Listening walks to identify forest sounds

- Barefoot sensory paths

- Cloud watching and weather observation



Construction & Engineering Play

Building shelters, creating dams, constructing towers from sticks. These activities develop spatial reasoning, physics understanding, collaborative problem-solving, and persistence. Children learn through trial and error in authentic contexts.

Forest School Connection: Natural materials provide authentic engineering challenges that plastic blocks cannot replicate: real weight, balance, and structural integrity.

Examples in Practice:

- Den building with tarps and branches
- Stick towers and natural sculptures
- Rope bridge challenges
- Dam construction in streams
- Weaving between trees
- Creating pulleys and simple machines



Nurturing & Stewardship Play

Caring for living things (plants, animals, and the forest itself) develops empathy, responsibility, and ecological awareness. Children learn they are part of a living community that needs their care and respect.

Forest School Connection: This play type builds the foundation for environmental stewardship and a lifelong connection to nature.

Examples in Practice:

- Tending a forest garden
- Bird feeding and watching
- Bug hotels and wildlife habitats
- Watering plants during dry spells
- Gentle observation of creatures
- Litter picking and forest care

Why Play-Based Learning Works

- **Neurological:** Play activates multiple brain regions simultaneously, creating stronger neural pathways than passive instruction.
- **Emotional:** Self-directed play reduces anxiety and builds intrinsic motivation that lasts a lifetime.
- **Social:** Social: Unstructured play requires negotiation, cooperation, and conflict resolution.
- **Physical:** Outdoor play develops gross motor skills, balance, coordination, and overall physical health.
- **Academic:** Children who engage in rich play show stronger literacy, numeracy, and executive function skills by age 7.

Emergent Literacy & Numeracy

Building foundations for reading, writing, and mathematical thinking through meaningful, nature-based experiences.

Our Approach

In kindergarten, we focus on developing a love of language and stories rather than rushing into formal reading instruction. Research shows that children who develop strong oral language skills, phonological awareness, and a love of books in their early years become confident, capable readers. The forest provides endless opportunities for rich language experiences.



Oral Language

Rich conversations about discoveries, storytelling around the campfire, and learning new vocabulary from nature.



Story & Print Awareness

Reading outdoor story books, noticing environmental print, and understanding that marks carry meaning.



Visual Literacy

Reading nature's signs (animal tracks, weather patterns, seasonal changes) and representing observations through drawing.



Mark Making

Drawing in mud and sand, creating nature journals, and developing fine motor skills through natural materials.



Phonological Awareness

Songs, rhymes, and word games played during hikes and gatherings to develop sound awareness.



Love of Stories

Fostering imagination and narrative thinking through daily story times and child-created tales.



UFLI Foundations for Kindergarten

We integrate the [University of Florida Literacy Institute \(UFLI\)](#) Foundations curriculum to provide systematic, explicit phonics instruction. Kindergarten covers **Lessons 1-68**, building from basic alphabet concepts through digraphs and vowel patterns.

The 8-Step Daily Routine

Each 30-minute UFLI lesson follows a consistent, research-based routine:

1 

Phonemic Awareness

Oral blending and segmenting practice using 'Robbie the Robot' activities.

2 

Visual Drill

Rapid naming of previously learned graphemes (letters and letter combinations).

3 

Auditory Drill

Writing graphemes corresponding to sounds heard.

4 

Blending Drill

Practice blending sounds into words using a blending board or word chains.

5 

New Concept

Explicit introduction of the day's new sound or spelling pattern.

6 

Word Work

Hands-on manipulation of letters to build and change words.

7 

Heart Words

Learning high-frequency words with irregular parts (e.g., 'the,' 'said').

8 

Connected Text

Reading decodable passages that apply new and previously learned concepts.

Kindergarten Scope & Sequence

Getting Ready

Lessons A-J

Foundational phonological awareness: blending and segmenting with 'Robbie the Robot'

The Alphabet

Lessons 1-34

Systematic introduction of letters and their sounds

Alphabet Review

Lessons 35-41

Review of short vowels (a, i, o, u, e) and practice with VC and CVC words

Digraphs

Lessons 42-53

FLSZ spelling rule and digraphs: /sh/, /th/, /ch/, /wh/, /ng/

VCe Patterns

Lessons 54-62

Long vowel sounds with silent 'e' (a_e, i_e, o_e, u_e)

Reading Longer Words

Lessons 63-68

Simple suffixes (-es, -ed, -ing) and basic syllable types

Core UFLI Components



Heart Words

Uses a "heart" symbol to mark irregular parts of high-frequency words that students learn by memory.



Sound Wall

Replaces traditional word walls with a display organized by how sounds are produced in the mouth.



Decodable Passages

Highly controlled texts that only include sounds and patterns students have been explicitly taught.

Forest Mathematics

Discovering mathematical concepts through exploration, play, and the natural world.

Our Approach to Numeracy

Mathematics in the forest is not about worksheets or rote memorization. Children develop deep number sense by counting real objects, solving authentic problems, and discovering patterns in nature. When a child figures out how to share acorns equally among friends or estimates how many pinecones will fit in a basket, they are building the mathematical thinking that will serve them for life.



Number Sense in Nature

Counting pinecones, comparing collections of leaves, and discovering quantities through natural treasures found on forest walks.



Patterns and Relationships

Identifying patterns in bark, leaves, and seasons. Creating and extending patterns using natural materials like stones and sticks.



Spatial Reasoning

Navigating forest trails, building structures with branches, and exploring shapes found in nature like hexagonal honeycomb.



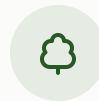
Measurement Exploration

Comparing lengths of sticks, measuring with footsteps, and exploring concepts of heavy and light with rocks and logs.



Data and Sorting

Sorting natural objects by attributes, creating pictographs of forest finds, and answering questions through simple data collection.



Problem Solving

Using mathematical thinking to solve real challenges: How many sticks for our shelter? Will this log balance? How do we share fairly?

Mathematics in the Forest

Counting and Quantity

Children count steps on trails, compare collections of treasures, and develop understanding that numbers represent real quantities through hands-on experiences.

△ Shapes and Structures

Building dens, examining spider webs, and noticing geometric shapes in leaves and flowers develops spatial awareness and geometric thinking.

✂ Real Problem Solving

Authentic challenges like sharing snacks equally, determining if a bridge will hold, or figuring out how many trips to carry supplies develop mathematical reasoning.

Life Skills

Essential skills for kindergarteners, developed naturally through forest play.



Self-Regulation

Learning to manage emotions, take deep breaths, and find calm in nature's embrace.



Building Relationships

Developing friendships, practicing kindness, and working together on group projects.



Environmental Care

Respecting living things, learning to tread lightly, and caring for our forest home.



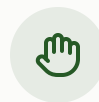
Risk Assessment

Making safe choices while climbing, exploring, and navigating the natural world.



Creative Problem-Solving

Using imagination and resourcefulness to overcome challenges in play.



Independence

Dressing for weather, managing belongings, and building confidence in abilities.