

Children's Discovery Garden in Iowa City Earns National Certification as Nature Explore Classroom

Written by Arbor Day Foundation
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Nebraska City, Neb. (July 12, 2011) – Children's Discovery Garden in Iowa City announced today that it earned the national designation of a certified Nature Explore Classroom from the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation.

The first Nature Explore Classroom is located in the Tree Adventure attraction at Arbor Day Farm, the Arbor Day Foundation's interactive conservation venue in Nebraska City, Neb.

Nature Explore Classrooms are part of the Nature Explore program, a collaborative project of the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation. Developed in response to the growing disconnect between children and nature, certified Nature Explore Classrooms are designed to help fill the void by educating young children using research-based principles for integrating nature into their daily learning.

These classrooms, which are being developed across the country, offer interactive elements – including musical instruments made of natural materials, climbing structures, wooden blocks, small waterways, garden areas, and natural materials for building and creating art – that give children important and inspiring nature experiences. While connecting children with nature, such unstructured play and activities are shown to enhance concentration, develop creativity and problem-solving, relieve stress, and improve skills in many areas.

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Children's Discovery Garden is located at the Robert A. Lee Community Recreation Center, 220 South Gilbert Street in Iowa City. Outdoor classrooms that are designed according to principles described in the Dimensions Foundation's *Learning With Nature Idea Book* are eligible to become certified Nature Explore Classrooms. In a certified Nature Explore Classroom, children can create visual masterpieces in a nature art area, build with natural materials, climb on natural structures, and practice their balance, agility, and creativity in areas designed for music and movement.

"Children's Discovery Garden has taken an important leadership role in a profoundly needed initiative to connect young children with nature, setting a wonderful example for education centers across the country," said Susie Wirth, Nature Explore outreach director for the Arbor Day Foundation. "Everyone at the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation appreciates the commitment Children's Discovery Garden has made to the Nature Explore program and to providing nature education opportunities for young children."

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