

# CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

## NATURE PLAY SPACE REFERENCE MANUAL

# **Overview**

The purpose of this manual is to make clear the expectations that are involved with starting and managing a Nature Play Space on park property.

## Why Nature Play?

The Chicago Park District is helping to reconnect children with nature in our city and the heritage of our parks by providing valuable outdoor space for communities in Chicago to have positive, hands-on experiences in nature.

Spontaneous, self-guided nature play by children has a beneficial impact on their health, attention and stress levels. With frequent, repeated visits, habitats designated or created for nature play can become safe spaces for children to develop motor skills, friendships, creativity and a sense of place in the environment of their city. Studies show that when children play in natural environments, they are more imaginative and cooperate better with other children. The variety of experiences available to children through nature play, including risk-taking activities, is a necessary component of youth development and the development of a future generation of conservation-minded citizens.

Designing, planting, building, and caring for a Nature Play Space is an ongoing creative project that can be a rewarding multi-generational effort. This work provides the opportunity to establish a direct connection with the land through hands-on physical work, and through interactions with youth that can inspire them to become the next generation of stewards. As a gateway to broader experiences in nature, these areas will weave the natural environment into the everyday lives of community members.

Each nature play space is a collaborative community effort, unique to the ecology of the site and the needs of the residents of each neighborhood. Nature play spaces are designed for play with elements of nature that can be manipulated and moved. Within the spaces are tiered "nodes of play" leading from more structured experiences towards "free play" zones actively managed to accommodate the investigations of children who have deeper interests in experimenting with and exploring nature.

See Appendix D for more information on nature play.

# **Responsibilities of Your Group**

Residents of Chicago who would like to develop a Nature Play Area in their neighborhood park should organize themselves as an official group, unless already active Park Advisory Council members. As a public agency, Park District policy requires inclusiveness; anyone interested in joining the Group is to be fairly considered. Meeting notes and agendas for Nature Play Group meetings will be considered public documents. Each Organizing Group must contain at least 3 adult liaisons (with 1 main point of contact) who are in support of the project in a leadership capacity, and 15 community members who are in support of the project (this may, within reason, include the children of parents involved in the group.) The 3 adult liaisons will serve as your Group's connection to the Chicago Park District and as representatives to the public.

Your group is responsible for the care of your Nature Play Space, both financially and in landscape maintenance and management. The nodes of play will be managed solely by the Group, while plants that are part of a Chicago Park District Natural Area will be in part maintained by Natural Areas crews.

We strongly encourage, but do not require, that at least one member of your Group serve as a member of your park's Advisory Council (if one exists). Your Group should take care to develop working relationships with the Park Supervisor and Area Manager as well, support from all of these parties is crucial.

Hands-on learning programs are encouraged in Nature Play Spaces as long as they engage children in the learning process and are directed by volunteers who have gone through the Chicago Park District volunteer process, including a fingerprint and background check. All liaisons are expected to go through this process prior to signing a Nature Play Space agreement.

Becoming a Registered Nature Play Area Group is required to actively manage a Nature Play Area on park property, and in return for your stewardship, the Nature Oasis program aims to support your work in ways that uphold the long-term sustainability of your space and Organizing Group. Tools and materials will be provided, as available, through the Nature Oasis program.

# **Responsibilities of the Chicago Park District**

The Chicago Park District's Nature Oasis program serves to support the long-term sustainability of your Nature Play Space by offering technical support, tools for workdays, education and networking opportunities, and promoting overall best practices in programming and land management. The management and care of your Nature Play Area, however, remains with you and the members of your group. Native plantings in preexisting Natural Areas will be maintained in part by Natural Areas crews from the Chicago Park District; however, the Group is required to repair damage done to plants by trampling in the form of new plantings or redirecting pathways into the prairie, marsh, or woodland.

Park District landscaping crews will be shown your Nature Play Space to assure that the boundaries are respected and to see where their maintenance responsibilities adjoin yours, such as picking up trash. Maintenance of plumbing features, when necessary, will remain the responsibility of the Park District. Nature Oasis staff will assist in the coordination of a yearly large-group workday for your group, assisting in the promotion, communication, and securing resources. The Park District Ecologist will be responsible for providing and updating a list of suitable species for any new plantings.

The Nature Oasis staff and your Park Supervisor are your main contacts for all departments within the Park District. Just as you have been given responsibility to maintain your Nature Play Space in an appealing manner, the Chicago Park District will work with you by sharing information about any activities in the park that may affect your space. The Chicago Park District will provide signage and flyer templates for the Group's planned activities. The Nature Oasis staff will provide communications and ideation support, as well as technical help throughout the project.

# The Process: Starting a New Nature Play Space

Outlined below is a step-by-step process for starting a new Nature Play Area. The Nature Oasis staff are happy to help guide you through this process and answer any questions you may have along the way. It can take anywhere from 6 - 12 months to get your Nature Play Area up and running, and depends in large part

on the location you've selected, your funding plan and the time of year you wish to begin. We welcome your application any time, and encourage fall or winter as the best time for your group to get started in planning.

#### **Step 1: Introductions**

- Form a group of neighbors and other community members who will be involved with your Nature Play Area. Include children in this process by identifying parent groups, park kids, and families that already use the space for play.
- Choose a Group name.
- Familiarize yourself with Nature Play Areas on park property. This manual describes in detail what is expected of your Group, not only as you are planning and building your Nature Play Area, but in the years to come. If you still have questions once you've read it through, please contact us at sarah.unz@chicagoparkdistrict.com

# **Step 2: Selecting the Location**

Nature Play Spaces on park property are a great way to bring community members together. When seeking a space to build in your park, look for any underutilized sections of the park which will not interfere with park aesthetics or existing recreational uses (unless these uses include nature free play.)

Consider activity in and around the space. Will the proposed area conflict with overall park usage? Please keep in mind that not all parks are well suited for Nature Play Areas, and when possible, our staff will try to guide you through this site selection process. Take note of any existing opportunities for play and use of these spaces by children. Muddy splashing puddles, climbing trees, and wandering thickets of brush are natural invitations for children to play. Any such space that welcomes children is an ideal starting point for building a Nature Play Area.

When you have identified a location you think would be well suited for your Nature Play Area, please take the following steps to ensure its availability:

- 1. First, check with the Park Supervisor to ensure the land you seek is on park property, and does not interfere with other park activities. If there is no field house near the location you are considering you may call 312-742-PLAY (7529) to get this information, or search the Chicago Park District website at **chicagoparkdistrict.com**.
- 2. Your Nature Play Area will be composed of regionally appropriate (preferably native) plantings in at least 50% of the space. Consider sun exposure and shade from buildings, trees, etc. No existing healthy trees will be removed to accommodate a Nature Play Area. Shady locations are ideal for siting any temporary structures, council rings, mulched circles, staging areas, or other built feature of the Nature Play Space.
- 3. Is it a reasonable distance to restroom facilities?
- 4. Nature Play Areas should be situated in an area that will NOT need a fence.

#### **Step 3: Submit your Initial Application**

Once you have identified a suitable space for your garden, submit the **Application for Starting Nature Play Area** (available on the Chicago Park District website) along with photos or drawings of the proposed idea to: **sarah.unz@chicagoparkdistrict.com** 

or by mail to:

#### Sarah Unz

Chicago Park District Culture, Arts & Nature 7059 S. South Shore Drive Chicago, IL 60649

After the application is received by the Park District, it will be reviewed as soon as possible. The group's liaison will then receive either an Application Approval Letter from the CPD directing you to proceed to Step 4 **OR** a request for more information. In some circumstances, the requested location may be denied. Any expansion to a nature play space that goes beyond the initial application footprint must be approved by the Chicago Park District.

## **Step 4: Community & Financial Support**

Community consent and support is vital in obtaining Park District approval for a successful Nature Play Area, as is your plan for funding the establishment and upkeep of the space. After your location has been approved, you may proceed with these next steps:

**Conduct a Site & Usage Survey**. Using the Nature Play Area Site & Usage Survey form found on our website, **three** separate site visits are to be conducted over a period of one to two weeks.

Survey visits determine what is going on in the area of the park surrounding your proposed Nature Play Area by identifying who is there, times of heaviest usage, any type of nearby sporting activities, etc. The Park Supervisor must accompany you on your first visit. Your remaining visits should occur during peak usage times, once on a weekday and once on a weekend. Your Park Supervisor can help you determine when to schedule your visits to satisfy this requirement.

**Identify funding.** One of most critical steps is to locate funds to develop and operate this Nature Play Area. Please refer to the Appendix for ideas. Please note that your group will need to cover the cost of any built elements in the space, as well as the long-term maintenance. A suggested cost sheet is part of this reference guide, but all costs are only suggestions. Nature Oasis Staff will replenish and store materials whenever available; however, this is not a guarantee of free supplies. The funds required starting and maintaining a Nature Play area can be minimal; however, some improvements, such as rocks, paths, transportation of large materials, and sawyer hours may cost more money.

**Meet with your Park Advisory Council** to share your plan <u>AND</u> **obtain a letter of support**. If your park does not have an advisory council, continue to maintain communication with your Park Supervisor and seek a letter of support from a neighborhood association or your Alderman.

A public meeting is required and serves to ensure any concerns from neighbors or other community members are heard. This meeting can be held in conjunction with a Park Advisory Council, CAPS or Neighborhood Association meeting, so long as the gathering is open to the public. Both the Park Supervisor and a Nature Oasis staff member should be notified one month in advance of the time, date and location of this meeting.

A **New Nature Play Space Petition Form** must be circulated within the neighborhood surrounding the proposed site. It is recommended petitioning at least 3 blocks in each direction. A minimum of 15 signatures is needed, with only one signature per household allowed. Members of the Organizing Group and members of their household are not permitted to sign.

#### Step 5: Submit your Final Proposal

After you have received the initial approval for your garden's location, and have gained the necessary community and financial support, you should create and submit your final proposal (see list below) to the

Nature Oasis staff member listed above. This is a more detailed description of your Nature Play Area plans that the Park District will use to consider your final design and installation process. You're almost finished!

- 1. Your **Petition** (Form #2), all **3 Site & Usage Surveys** (Form #3), your **Letter of Support**, and a written report detailing all of the following:
- 2. **Group Membership roster:** name of your Group, park, contact information of the primary group leader, secondary group leader, and a complete listing of current group members.
- 3. **Funding plan:** provide a detailed funding plan, outlining how much the Nature Play Area will cost, and the sources of your funding.
- 4. **Nature Play Area design:** should be detailed and to scale, and include dimensions of the garden as a whole, the location of the water source (required), nearby streets, buildings, and trees.
- 5. **Plant list:** provide a list of plants to be used in the garden. Native and drought/trample resistant plants are strongly encouraged in our Nature Play Spaces. For guidance, please consult our list of Native Plant Suggestions, which can be found at www.chicagoparkdistrict.com. For a more detailed list, contact sarah.unz@chicagoparkdistrict.com
- 6. Installation, labor & supply plan:
  - How and by whom will your Nature Play Area be built? What is the source for materials such as lumber and soil? How will you ensure they are replenished in future years?
- 7. **Maintenance plan:** provide a detailed maintenance plan, including a schedule for the coming year, indicating how the Nature Play Area will be cared for on a daily and seasonal basis, including watering, weeding, mulching, planting and play node repair/replacement.

# **Registration Acceptance**

After the Park District has received all of the required documents, they will be reviewed and your liaison will be notified of your registration status.

A Letter of Commitment Form must be signed by the lead liaison from the group and an alternate. This form acknowledges that you agree to the terms set forth in the document and formalizes your agreement with the Chicago Park District. All group members must submit signed Liability Waivers to accompanying this form and all group members must pass a Background Check. Schedule the background check with Sarah Unz.

**IMPORTANT:** Your Group is required to renew its Nature Play Area registration **every two years**. You will be asked for a short progress report on your space, current membership details, and a budget plan for the next two years. Your Group will also be required to submit a renewed Letter of Commitment.

# Appendix A: Details from the Letter of Commitment

The most important aspect of successful community projects is long-term community support and communication between the community and the Chicago Park District. Listed below are the responsibilities and guidelines the Group must follow:

### **MANAGEMENT**

The Nature Oasis staff is designed to help your group not only start your Nature Play Area, but also help you sustain a positive and productive presence in your park. Maintaining communication with the Park District

regarding management of the Play Area is expected. Information about changes in leadership, events, playshops, classes, etc. that are hosted in the Area should be shared with the Nature Oasis staff. If problems occur with the operation or patrons of the Nature Play Area, the Park Supervisor should be informed and involved in the resolution of any problems. In the event the group leader needs to step down, he or she is responsible for recruiting and facilitating new organizational leadership.

The Group shall inform any new volunteers of the Nature Play Area Guidelines, stressing the importance of ongoing maintenance. The Group must follow a transparent membership process open to all. As a public agency, Park District policy requires inclusiveness; anyone interested in joining the Group is to be fairly considered.

#### **NATURE PLAY AREA MAINTENANCE**

The Group is entirely responsible for the maintenance of the Nature Play Area "play nodes" and for replacing damaged or trampled plants on a yearly basis. Natural Areas crews and contractors are responsible for periodically scheduled plantings and maintenance. Landscape crews are responsible for trash pickup. Keep in mind that the space allocated is on public land and must always be actively maintained. The Group must follow the Maintenance plan, outlined in Step 6 of your Written Proposal.

The Park District will not do any maintenance within the Nature Play Area Nodes. Through the Park District's independent observation, if the space is deemed unsightly, or otherwise neglected, the designated liaison will be given two separate warning notices via two different means (for example, phone call and email) each time. If the problem continues thereafter, the agreement will be revoked and the Group will be responsible for proposing a plan to restore the Play Area to parkland to the satisfaction of the Park District's Department of Cultural & Natural Resources (DCNR).

#### WORKDAYS AND PLAYSHOPS

Each Nature Play Area Group must designate one or more "workday leaders" and one or more "playshop leaders." Built into the maintenance schedule will be at least 4 workdays per year and at least one playshop per year, the details of which are outlined below.

**Workdays:** the Nature Play Area Group and volunteers work to replace or repair damaged play nodes, install new materials, and assess the site for future maintenance needs.

**Playshops**: family groups will be invited to participate in an educational activity in the Play Area, supervised by a representative from the group and one Nature Oasis or park staff member.

#### PLANT MATERIAL

Any edible plants must be installed in raised garden beds with clean soil and will be considered for the purposes of demonstration only and to encourage the act of gardening. If the group seeks community garden space, please contact <a href="mailto:communitygardens@chicagoparkdistrict.com">communitygardens@chicagoparkdistrict.com</a>

## **ORGANIC PRACTICES**

In keeping with the Chicago Park District's commitment to sustainability, and for the health and safety of all park patrons, it is required that all growing practices, including disease and pest control, be organic. NO CHEMICAL PEST CONTROL MEASURES MAY BE USED. All soil used for digging must be organic, clean soil.

#### PERMANENT STRUCTURES AND SIZEABLE LANDSCAPE MATERIAL

Permanent structures such as playround equipment, fences, walls, and sizeable plant material such as **trees** are **NOT** allowed, unless approved by DCNR. Sheds are not permitted. Play nodes that are damaged or vandalized beyond repair must be removed by December 1<sup>st</sup> of every year.

#### PLAY AREA BORDERS

The Nature Play Area boundaries must remain as submitted on the original design plans. <u>Any</u> proposed modification or expansion requests must be approved by DCNR BEFORE any changes are made. Please contact the Nature Oasis staff for further guidance and instructions.

#### **VANDALISM**

Like drought, hail and freezing temperatures, theft and vandalism are among the assumed risks of operating a Nature Play Area in the park. All spaces within the parks are and will continue to be public property. While the Nature Oasis Program continues to support efforts to reduce unnecessary vandalism or theft, we cannot guarantee that any Area is free from the risk.

#### **DOGS**

No dogs are allowed, on or off-leash, in a Nature Play Area. This is an unnecessary risk for both children and pet owners, as children may not know how to interact with dogs or have had traumatic experiences with them in the past, and not all dogs are well behaved even on a leash.

## LIABILITY

The Park District is not responsible for the Nature Play Area itself, or to anything in or pertaining to the Area. **EACH MEMBER OF THE GROUP MUST SIGN A WAIVER OF LIABILITY [FORM 4B].** 

#### **SIGNAGE**

Each Nature Play Area will be provided with a sign by the Park District upon request.

## **VEHICLES**

Park patrons are permitted to use motorized vehicles within a park **ONLY** on designated roadways, driveways and parking facilities. The parking or driving of motorized vehicles by any park patron on walkways, restricted-access drives, lawn areas, under trees, or within landscaped areas is strictly forbidden.

#### **WATER SOURCE**

If there is no water source on-site, a watering schedule and source description must be outlined in your maintenance plan, whether that means a rain barrel or partnership agreement with a neighbor. Requests for water source upgrades can be made to the Park Supervisor but are not guaranteed.

## PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES IN THE NATURE PLAY AREA

- Littering, dumping, grilling, alcohol consumption and any otherwise unlawful activities.
- Amplified sound.
- Pets are not allowed in the garden per the Code of the Chicago Park District.
- Ball playing or other forms of active recreation.

#### PLAY AREA TERMINATION

If the Group decides to no longer maintain their space, they must immediately notify the Park District. The Group will be responsible for proposing a plan to restore the Nature Play Area to parkland to the satisfaction of the Park District's Department of Cultural & Natural Resources (DCNR).

While unlikely, the Chicago Park District reserves the right to remove the Nature Play Area at any time and will make every effort to provide notification prior to removal.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

A Chicago Park District representative may attend a neighborhood association and/or Park Advisory Council meeting to review the successes or challenges experienced by the Nature Play Area Organizers. The Park District will take appropriate action based on that assessment. Failure by the Nature Play Area organizers

to provide the required operational and financial support will result in the removal of the garden by the Park District.

# Appendix B: Funding Ideas, Resources and Classes

Here are a few ideas for locating funds and/or horticultural resources for your Nature Play Area:

- Friends of the Parks may have seed grants available for registered Nature Play Areas: http://fotp.org/
- Your Park Advisory Council may be able to work with your Group to hold fundraising events.
- Kilbourn Park Organic Greenhouse offers workshops and lectures, as well as their annual plant sale and Harvest Festival. They provide horticultural ideas, resources, and programs: www.kilbournpark.org
- Garfield Park Conservatory hosts the "Play and Grow garden," a natural play area with materials
  from the surrounding environment and from within the garden. They provide a wealth of
  information, ideas and resources for horticulture: <a href="http://www.garfield-conservatory.org/">http://www.garfield-conservatory.org/</a>
- Openlands supports Urban Greening program, and offers training courses such as Building Urban Gardens, Treekeepers and GardenKeepers: <a href="http://www.openlands.org/">http://www.openlands.org/</a>
- Chicago Botanic Garden has an extensive line of lectures, classes and workshops available. They
  also have wonderful demonstration gardens of various types and designs:
   http://www.chicagobotanic.org/
- University of Illinois Extension website supplies a wealth of resources: web.extension.illinois.edu They have a plant clinic based at the Garfield Park Conservatory where they can troubleshoot many individual plant/gardening problems. Soil testing, Master Gardener and Master Composter certification classes are also available.
- Local businesses may be interested in donating materials or may have funds available to support your project.
- Local officials, including your Alderman may have funds available to support such a community improvement project.
- National Guidelines, Nature Play and Learning Places. Robin C. Moore, pdf preview available here: <a href="https://design.ncsu.edu/natureplay/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Nature-Play-Learning-Places">https://design.ncsu.edu/natureplay/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Nature-Play-Learning-Places</a> v1.6 Sept 2015f.pdf
- North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 N. Pulaski. walking stick woods is a great example of a large natural play space, programmed with early childhood learning opportunities through the Forest Playschool.
- Neighborspace's Jardincito, located at 23<sup>rd</sup> and Whipple st. in Little Village is an example of a small natural play area with many play nodes and community-led activities.

# **Appendix C: Thinking About Costs**

Costs for a Nature Play spaces can range from very small (under \$100) to very large (over \$50,000) depending on the Group's interests and the community's needs. Here are some examples of startup costs. These are only examples, not actual quotes. Some materials can usually be obtained

for free such as mulch, logs, and reclaimed building resources, while some materials that are not local to the area and may be harder to source: gravel, boulders, shells, animal bones, etc...

Example	Cost
Structures (Sensory beds, water wall, display boards, containers)	\$0 - \$40, can be hand-made
Materials for sensory beds or pits (e.g soil, rocks, gravel)	Upwards of \$100 for clean/organic soil
Native plants (plugs, replacement plants)	\$85/36 – 50 plugs Quarts: \$5.25/ea

# **Appendix D: Nature Play Defined**

Many of the parks in the Chicago Park District were designed by landscape architect Jens Jensen with children and nature in mind. Features in these local landmarks include spaces designated as prairie rivers, sun openings, large oaks, country swimming holes, and stone circles designed as gathering spaces and outdoor theatre spaces. These features were originally intended to bring the children of Chicago opportunities to spend time immersed in nature, playing, splashing, experimenting, and exploring. Today, the Chicago Park District is helping to reconnect children with nature in our city and the heritage of our parks by providing valuable outdoor space for communities in Chicago to have positive, hands-on experiences in nature.

Spontaneous, self-guided nature play by children has a beneficial impact on their health, attention and stress levels. With frequent, repeated visits, habitats designated or created for nature play can become safe spaces for children to develop motor skills, friendships, creativity and a sense of place in the environment of their city. Studies show that when children play in natural environments, they are more imaginative and cooperate better with other children. The variety of experiences available to children through nature play, including risk-taking activities, is a necessary component of youth development and the development of a future generation of conservation-minded citizens.

The tiered design of Nature Play Areas allows for spaces to transition from open parkland to natural area through the sustained use of children in the community. For the purposes of this manual, Nature Play Areas

#### Are:

- Habitat for plants, insects, birds, fungi, and other species endemic to the region.
- Disturbed or ruderal areas with dead and living trees, climbing opportunities, and chances for children to change the environment.
- Directed by children, therefore can appear messy and disorganized.

#### Are not:

- Playgrounds with permanent, fixed equipment or structures built or sold by playground designers.
- Rule-based.
- Directed by adults.
- Within the fall zone of an existing playground, road, or bike path.
- Permanent.
- Built solely on lawns or artificial turf.

# May Contain:

- Loose parts, such as tree cookies, branches, gravel, stones, mulch, dirt, and mud that children can experiment with at will.
- Nodes of play (see definition)
- A border.
- Community-built, custom-made nature play equipment.

- Spaces that provide opportunities for solitary rest and reflection by children away from screens.
- Able to accommodate programming from volunteer groups and environmental educators.
- Pristine natural areas with endangered, threatened, or sensitive species on-site.
- Opportunities for imaginative play such as role play, hide-andseek, or dramatic play.
- Climbing trees.
- Digging beds or borrow pits of clean soil, varied topography, and hiding places.

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Designing, planting, building, and caring for a Nature Play Area is an ongoing creative project which can be a rewarding multi-generational effort. This work provides the opportunity to establish a direct connection with the land through hands-on physical work, through gardening, and through interactions with youth that can inspire them to become the next generation of stewards. As a gateway to broader experiences in nature, these areas will weave the natural environment into the everyday lives of community members.

Hands-on learning programs are encouraged in Nature Play Spaces as long as they engage children in the learning process and are directed by volunteers who have gone through the Natural Areas Volunteer process, including a fingerprint and background check. All liaisons will be expected to go through this process prior to signing an agreement.

Becoming a Registered Nature Play Area Group is required to actively manage a Nature Play Area on park property, and in return for your stewardship the Nature Oasis program hopes to support your work in ways that uphold the long term sustainability of your space and Organizing Group. Tools and materials will be provided as available on loan or to your group for construction through the Nature Oasis program.

The purpose of this manual is to make clear the expectations that are involved with starting and managing a Nature Play Area on park property.

## **Definitions:**

A Nature Play and Learning Place is defined by the Natural Learning Initiative as:

"A designated, managed area in an existing or modified outdoor environment where children of all ages and abilities play and learn by engaging with and manipulating diverse natural elements, materials, organisms, and habitats, through sensory, fine motor and gross motor experiences." <sup>1</sup>

# Management by the Nature Play Group is:

The continuous, scheduled maintenance, replacement, and repair of plantings, structures, and nodes of play within the Nature Play Area. Active management strategies include planning and designing spaces to accommodate existing uses as they change over the years, allowing for the input and assistance of stakeholders of the space, primarily children. Workdays will be scheduled as "playshops" to allow for children to inform and guide the use of the space. A workday and playshop schedule will be submitted as part of the group's proposal packet.

## A Chicago Park District Nature Play Area is defined, using these guidelines, as

An assigned space within a park that is managed organically by an organized group of community members for the purpose of promoting spontaneous free play by children, allowing them to immerse themselves in nature, or for educational activities led by an environmental educator or forest school group. In order to qualify, the Nature Play Area must be managed towards a goal of at least 50% plant coverage. The site must contain only native vegetation or combination of native (minimum 80%) and non-native plant material suitable to the region (non-invasive non-natives.) The Organizing group is solely responsible for all management, financing and ongoing maintenance of this space.

Nature Play Spaces are disturbed habitat for plants, insects, birds, fungi, and other species in the region. They may contain non-native plants, include dead and living trees, hills, gravel, climbing opportunities, and chances for children to change their surroundings. These components represent the larger wild environment in a way that feels safe and manageable to young visitors. Nature Play Areas appear messy and disorganized, with play directed by children using loose parts, such as tree cookies, branches, gravel, stones, mulch, dirt, and mud. Programmable spaces provide opportunities for individual rest and reflection. Nature Play Areas are not permanent playgrounds with equipment built and manufactured by playground designers. Activities taking place are not rule-based or directed by adults. They are also not located in hazardous areas (e.g. near the fall zone of an existing playground or path). Nature Play Areas are impermanent spaces subject to change by children and by the community members who steward the site. Components within the site such as exact nodes of play, borders, types of activities taking place, trees, and physical features depend on the nature of each site and the decision-making process of children and adults who use it.

## Nodes of Play are defined as

Locations within a Nature Play Area that are designed to remain open and inviting for self-directed children's play, including activities such as jumping, hiding, digging, wandering, planting, building, self-reflection, and more.

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