

# Nature Explore Classroom



Nature Explore Classrooms are the product of a collaborative effort between the National Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation of Lincoln, Nebraska. Developed as a response to the growing disconnect between children and nature, Nature Explore Classrooms feature hands-on manipulation of natural materials in creative and unstructured play.

Backed by seven years of field-testing by Dimensions Educational Research

Foundation, Nature Explore Classrooms provide a connection with nature that benefits children educationally, behaviorally and developmentally. Additional results from their research indicate that nature play:

- \* Helps build visual-spatial skills
- \* Strengthens powers of observation and creativity
- \* Improves the ability to concentrate, even among children with attention deficit disorder
- \* Develops imagination and sense of wonder—motivating factors for life-long learning

“The Missouri Botanical Garden’s focus on exposing young children to the wonders of nature make it an ideal site for a Nature Explore Classroom,” said John Rosenow, CEO of the National Arbor Day Foundation. Located near the Visitor Center at Shaw Nature Reserve, the Nature Explore Classroom will open on March 29, 2008 and will target children ages three through eight. The classroom includes the following areas: an Entry area, Nature Art, Music, Building, Climbing and Crawling, and a Messy area. These areas will be differentiated by the use of native plant material to form the “walls”.

Each area focuses on connecting children with nature through hands-on interaction with moveable, natural materials during unstructured play. In these areas, children have the opportunity to build with natural blocks and tree cookies (cross-segments of tree trunks), create music with rain sticks, a marimba and other natural instruments, climb log steps and crawl through logs, dance with colorful scarves, or make art from plant material, stones and seed pods.

The Shaw Nature Reserve’s Nature Explore Classroom will serve as a model for innovative teaching and learning about nature education using research-based techniques in an outdoor classroom setting.