



Nature Kin Farm and Forest School Parent Handbook

Nature Kin Contact Information

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Main Source of Communication: Remind

About the Farm and Forest School Dream

Jean Lomino and Diana Meadows first became acquainted in the fall of 2014 at her Learning Center located on the family farm at Lookout Lake. Jean and Diana quickly discovered that they shared the same philosophy of education and a passion for connecting children with the natural world. Wauhatchie Forest Kindergarten opened in September 2015 as the first forest kindergarten in the state of Tennessee with 15 students.

Over the next five years, the school continued to grow, with the addition of three new sites around Chattanooga and a full-day K-3rd grade program. At the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, the enrollment stood at 160, with a staff of 23 and since then, the enrollment has grown to over 200.

Jean announced to the WS Board of Directors in 2020 that she was resigning as Director of Wauhatchie School. She wanted to devote her time to teacher training, Forest School advocacy efforts, and writing. But Jean also had another dream to fulfill. On her travels to China and Korea visiting forest school programs there, she was especially inspired by their

focus on gardens, culture, and food. She came home eager to create a new school that would incorporate all the best elements of forest school with the addition of gardening and farming.

Her dream took her back to Lookout Lake, and a new program, Nature Kin Farm & Forest School, became a reality in August 2021. We want to thank Diana Meadows and her family for granting us the use of this beautiful space for the past two years. Our school would not exist without their generosity.

Just like the plants and animals around us, we are learning to be adaptable and resilient—to adjust to changing circumstances. We moved Nature Kin Farm and Forest School in 2023 to Crabtree Farms, a popular and long-established working urban farm on a historic Chattanooga farm site.

Here are some of the benefits our students will gain at Crabtree Farms:

- Make deeper connections with the land through agriculture. Besides learning all about farming, our students will gain a practical understanding of sustainable living and the importance of “getting back to the land.” Crabtree Farms operates greenhouses, large garden plots, and a community garden.
- Engage in community-based activities with the neighbors who live around the farm by participating in regular service-learning projects. We are looking for ways our students may assist with field classes when children from area schools come to visit. We would also like to conduct weekend workshops for the larger community in which our students can take active roles.
- Daily opportunities to dig into the land, literally and figuratively, to find their roots. They will continue their engagement in the forest: self-directed explorations, shelter-building, bush-crafting, and related forest activities. In finding their place on the land, both in the gardens and in the forest, they will become compassionate stewards of the earth.
- Stronger academic connections through the operation of our Farm Stand. This business provides many interdisciplinary learning connections including entrepreneurship, accounting, writing, marketing, civics, science, and art. The Farm Stand will be open to the public regularly and also during special seasonal, weekend events sponsored by Crabtree Farms.

We are proud to offer this amazing opportunity in Chattanooga. Our goal is that this school will help children and families experience greater community with all of their nature kin, leading to a more compassionate and hope-filled world.

Student Objectives

Nature Kin F&F School Students will--

- Thrive within a learning community that is designed to help them become responsible citizens and independent, motivated thinkers.
- Learn best by doing real, meaningful work alongside experienced mentors.
- Develop critical thinking skills when their Guides (teachers) offer insightful questions rather than direct answers to their questions.
- Lead their own learning. Student will identify themes of study and the projects they wish to pursue in the context of daily explorations on the farm and in the forest. Guides are responsible to expand and enrich the chosen themes and assist students in development of their projects.
- Learn to think independently, take responsibility and embrace challenges. They are being prepared to bring their own unique genius to the world.
- Develop honesty, hard work, responsibility, kindness and empathy.
- Learn together in a mixed-age class, where they learn to be mentors and to be mentored by one another.
- Understand the interrelationships throughout the earth community— between plants, animals and human beings—and how these relationships support and sustain a hopeful, compassionate world.

General Information

Teacher Qualifications: All teachers have relevant degrees and Forest school certifications as well as current First Aid and CPR certification. All teachers and substitutes have completed an interview process, background check and come with strong references from their previous employers.

Academic Calendar: Nature Kin has its own calendar, with family days and more, but we do closely follow the Hamilton County Department of Education Academic Calendar. (start dates, end dates, major and Federal holidays). We do not follow Hamilton County school closings due to weather. You can find the calendar on the FAQs page of the website.

Enrollment fee: The enrollment fee is non-refundable.

Withdrawal: Parents who wish to withdraw their child from Nature Kin at any time during the school year, must communicate their plan as far in advance as possible with the School Director.

Nature Kin Daily Routines and Guidelines

Arrival Time: It is important for children to arrive at school on time at 9:00 am. Occasionally the day may start at a different site than the normal drop-off location. If arriving late, after the group has left, it becomes the parents' responsibility to walk their child to the correct gathering spot for that day.

Absences: If a child will be absent due to illness or if it is a planned absence, the parent must communicate with their child's teacher in person or via Remind as soon as possible.

After School Pick-up Policy and Procedures: No child is ever released to an adult who is not listed on the emergency form. If the adult is not listed on the authorized pickup list, the parent needs to inform the office ahead of time to add that person to the pickup list. Unknown adults are required to present identification at pick up. In the case of recurring late pick-ups, the Director will notify the parents to discuss options to remedy the situation.

Lunch: All students should bring a packed lunch each day, as well as any snacks they may eat.

Food at School: Nature Kin strives to incorporate sustainable practices in all we do and we encourage our parents to support those efforts. Please send snacks and lunches in reusable containers or minimally and/or compostable packaging.

Food Allergies: Teachers are aware of any allergies present in their class from the information provided on the emergency form. Teachers will not offer food to a child if it contains an ingredient that the child is allergic to and will notify the parent(s) ahead of time if a food is being served that a child cannot eat so the parent can send a substitute.

Weather Policy and Closings

To preserve the safety of our children and staff, we will carefully assess the weather forecasts and current conditions, and close if conditions warrant such actions. In the event of inclement weather, Nature Kin Farm & Forest School will make every effort to open as usual. This means that we will **NOT** follow Hamilton County weather delays and closings. We strive for the children to experience all types of weather in order to embrace the values of a forest school.

Unexpected severe weather during school hours: If warnings are issued during school hours, or heavy downpours and lightning occur, all children will be moved indoors until the threat is over. It is at the discretion of the Director to make the decision to dismiss early, open late, or close.

Prediction of severe Weather before school hours: In the event of delays or cancellations, a decision will be made by 7:00 a.m. and you will receive an announcement on Remind.

Child Safety Guidelines

We are committed to keeping our children safe. As naturalists we are committed to inspiring and teaching respect for the earth and all its creatures and this includes modeling and fostering respect for self and for others at all times. We adhere to the following guidelines to provide consistent boundaries in the name of safety. We ask that parents uphold these same standards while onsite as well as at school events outside of regular school hours. It is also helpful to reinforce many of these practices at home. Outdoor learning provides many opportunities for cooperative play and teachers are there to guide children into co-creative adventures. A very important part of the forest school experience is helping children learn how to get along in the world, enjoy being with other children, and follow the direction of an adult other than their parents.

Discipline Strategies

- Encouraging children to use their words when having a disagreement with another child.
- Facilitating children in their attempts to settle their own disputes.
- Redirecting behavior when this seems potentially effective.
- Separating a child from the group with calming strategies (sit spot, leaf breathing).
- Counseling children individually about their behaviors.
- Keeping an open line of communication with parents.

General Farm and Forest Rules

- **No Toys (some exceptions to this rule will be made):** Nature provides all the materials necessary for playing outdoors, so toys from home are not necessary. Art supplies and other learning materials will be provided.
- **Boundaries:** Children are expected to stay within the boundaries that have been established by teachers.
- **Climbing trees:** Children may climb trees at school while under adult supervision. They must demonstrate competence before climbing twice their height.
- **Sticks:** Children may not play with sticks unless they are clearly and responsibly being used as a walking stick, a tool (digging, for example), or for building. Sticks may not be imagined as weapons—guns, knives, spears etc. Nature Kin Farm & Forest School is a “weapon-free zone.”
- **Ingestion:** Children will not eat or drink any substance found in nature without teacher permission.

Physical Safety: The children are always within eyesight and earshot of an approved adult. Each class stays together in designated areas specific to each portion of the day. The only people that interact with the school children during the day are preapproved by the faculty

and are never alone with the children. Teachers carry emergency forms and an official first aid kit at all times.

Site Assessment: The sites and structures are checked for safety each morning before the children arrive at school.

Fire Safety: Children will be under the supervision of their teacher(s) when in the vicinity of fire or hot coals. They will learn specific instructions based on their age and ability to start and tend a fire.

Water Safety: All visits to the creek and pond are under full supervision of the teachers. Children will be allowed to wade in water that is less than knee deep while wearing boots.

First Aid at School: In the case of a minor injury, the teachers may administer basic first aid—wash the injury with soap and water and cover with band-aids—as they see fit. The parents will be notified of any significant injuries at pickup (or after school via phone call if the child is picked up by another adult). In the case of a major injury, the teachers will call 911 and the parents/emergency contact and apply basic first aid until medical help arrives. All teachers have easy access to First Aid kits at all times. Children will always be sent to the nearest hospital if such extreme measures are needed.

Illness: To control the spread of illness, children with vomiting, diarrhea, and/or fever should not be sent to school until the child has been symptom free, without medication, for 24 hours. Should a child become ill while at school, parents will be contacted to pick up the sick child promptly. If a parent cannot be reached immediately teaching staff will call the next emergency contact to arrange pick-up.

Dispensing medication: You will need to provide a signed authorization that allows teachers to administer medication, even non-prescription. Specific instructions regarding dosage, frequency, and symptoms of the condition for which the medication is administered should be listed on the authorization form signed by a parent. The medication should be labeled with the child's name. The Nature Kin School staff member who administers the medication will document the time, the dosage, and any noticeable side effects.

Emergency Evacuation: In the unlikely case that we would need to evacuate the property, all parents would be notified via Remind of the destination and pick up protocols.

Clothing and Gear List

Because Nature Kin Farm and Forest School embraces all seasons and aims to remain outside during many types of weather, it is CRITICAL that your child has clothes and gear that allows him or her to explore comfortably. We adhere to the motto: There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes. Below you will find a list of NECESSARY items as well as helpful tips and suggestions regarding clothing and gear. This list of required gear is subject to change. As the school year progresses and children's engagement with natural elements are monitored, teachers may add or change necessary items and gear that are optimal for children's activities.

- Backpack
- Water Bottle
- Packed Lunch
- Snack(s), if needed/wanted
- Sunscreen
- Bug Spray

MOST IMPORTANT: CLOTHES

- *Waterproof, not water resistant*, non-insulated Rain Gear, pants and jacket
- Hat
 - Warm days: light hat with brim for sun; caps help keep rain off face
 - Cool/Cold days: hats to keep warm; keep ears covered
- Gloves
 - All Year: gardening, work gloves
 - Cool Days: light, warm gloves
 - Cold Days: waterproof gloves, a layer of gloves under when needed
- Safe Footwear
 - Summer: Rain boots with thin socks and Water Shoes
 - Fall: Rain boots with good socks
 - Winter: Insulated Boots with layers of socks (no snow "duck" boots)
 - Spring: Rain boots with good socks
- Layers: Always keep an extra dry layer of clothes at school, according to weather.
 - Summer: Quick Dry shorts and short-sleeved shirts
 - Fall: Cool mornings and warmer afternoons, light layers
 - Winter: Warm layers, including silk, wool, or polyester
 - Layers! We strongly recommend that your child wear several layers.
 - If you choose to wear snow pants or thick coats, they must fit under rain pants and rain jacket. **Snow gear is only water resistant and not an acceptable outer layer.** The outer layer must keep the wetness out.
 - Spring: : Cool mornings and warmer afternoons, light layers

Helpful Hints

- Label everything!
Layering is key! Some days are 1-layer clothing days, some 2-layer days, some 3-layers. It is much easier to take layers off as needed than to warm a child that has already gotten chilled. The children's needs throughout the day are often unpredictable and will depend not only on the weather conditions but also the child's body temperature and activity level. We layer to adjust to the variety of conditions we encounter.
- In the winter: Wearing 2 layers of wool long underwear underneath a thick wool sweater and fleece pants is the most effective way to layer children under their rain gear in order to keep them warm without feeling too bulky.
- We're going to get dirty! Please make sure you dress your children in clothes that can get messy.
- Comfortability:
 - All clothing and footwear should be loose fitting and roomy to allow the body's own insulating layer to surround the skin. This is more comfortable and keeps the children warmer.
 - Pants are more comfortable for children when they have elastic waists instead of buttons or snaps.
 - Please stay away from one- piece clothing such as snow bibs, as they can be problematic when using the bathroom.
- **VERY IMPORTANT: Please label everything with your child's name.**
- There are many places to order soft wool products that are not itchy to sensitive skin. Second hand stores are a great place for silk, wool and fleece layers.

Maintaining your gear

- Once it is really wet and muddy: rain gear can go in the wash by itself when you get home on the rinse cycle (without soap - to preserve the waterproofing a little longer), and then either drip dry or put it in a low-heat dryer cycle.
- Jackets may be slightly less muddy than pants, so you may get a few days of wear out of them before needing to rinse them.
- 'Tear Aid' is a product that Puddle gear recommends for maintaining rain gear. This product is much more effective than duct tape in the long run (duct tape gets gummy), but for a short-term fix, duct tape works in a pinch.
- Kookaburra or Eucalan wool wash products protect the lanolin in the wool that maintains the warm when-wet properties. When aired out at night, wool does not hold odors and when worn under other layers, only needs to be washed every few weeks.
- If you purchase your pair of Bogs boots from REI, they will take them back if damaged and give you a new pair.

Parent Handbook Agreement Form

The Nature Kin Farm & Forest School Parent Handbook lists the values, policies, rules, and regulations of Nature Kin. Its purpose is to assure the smooth operation of our program. Reading and understanding this handbook is imperative to the operations of Nature Kin Farm & Forest School. By signing this form, you are agreeing to abide by these written provisions of Nature Kin Farm & Forest School.

I understand that my signature on this form binds me to observe the policies, rules, and regulations as set forth by Nature Kin Farm and Forest School.

Signature _____ Date _____

Tuition and Payment Options

Program Options & Tuition: 12 students per day cap

Monday/Wednesday (ages 5-8) 9 AM-12 PM **\$300 per month**

Tuesday/Thursday (ages 8-12) 9 AM-3 PM **\$425 per month**

Non-refundable Entrance fee: \$150

Friday (ages 6-15) 9 AM-3 PM **\$250 per month** Monthly Commitment, No Entrance fee required, Tuition due 1st of the month to confirm a spot. Optional drop-in day (\$75).

After-School Care Monday/Wednesday (ages 5-12) 12 PM-3 PM **\$300 per month** Monthly Commitment, No Entrance fee required, Tuition due 1st of the month to confirm a spot.

Early drop-off for all program options: 8:30 AM: an additional fee of \$20 per month

Tuition is due by the 7th of each month. There is a 10% late fee if paid after the 7th.

PayPal: info@forestteacher.org

Venmo: @naturekinfarmandforest

Or Mail Check to: Forest School Teacher Institute: 724 Ashley Forest Drive, Hixson, TN 37343

Please note child's name on payments.

Withdraw Refund Policy

Before the 15th of the month: 50% refund for current month.

The 15th of the month and on: No refund.