



FOREST EXTENSION PROGRAM

— A Kinderwood Education —

Curriculum Outline and Guide

2026-2027

Kinderwood Forest Extension Program

PROGRAM PURPOSE:

The Kinderwood Forest Extension Program (Forest Ext.) extends the Montessori prepared environment into the forests, fields, trails, and natural spaces of the Adirondacks. At the heart of the program is the development of resilient, capable, and connected children. In a world increasingly shaped by screens, immediate gratification, and adult-managed experiences, young children need regular opportunities to wait, wonder, struggle safely, solve problems, and experience the satisfaction of doing difficult things.

The program will nurture a generation of local Adirondackers who are comfortable outdoors, attentive to their surroundings, cooperate with others, responsible for their choices, and confident in their ability to meet challenges. The forest will serve not simply as a recreational setting, but as a living classroom and community to which children belong.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY:

The program is guided by the belief that resilience cannot be taught through explanation alone. It develops through repeated, supported experiences with manageable difficulty and real-world, child-focused intrigue. Children will develop emotional, physical, cognitive, social, and environmental resilience.

- Directly experience the subjects they are studying
- Follow their curiosity and return to discoveries over time
- Move their bodies freely and purposefully
- Make meaningful choices with clear and intentional boundaries
- Participate in real work that benefits their community
- Experience manageable challenges without adults immediately removing every difficulty
- Collaborate, negotiate, and solve problems with other children
- Develop relationships with particular places, plants, animals, and seasonal patterns
- Be trusted as capable learners while receiving appropriate adult support

CURRICULUM PILLARS:

PILLAR 1: RELATIONSHIP WITH PLACE AND NATURE

Children will:

- Regularly visit and care for a consistent forested site
- Notice seasonal and weather-related changes
- Develop familiarity with local plants, animals, landforms, and habitats
- Recognize that the forest is a community of living and nonliving elements
- Practice respectful observation and interaction
- Participate in stewardship activities appropriate to their age
- Develop affection for the natural world before being asked to assume abstract responsibility for protecting it
- Examples: adopting a tree, maintaining a sit spot, observing pools, maintaining walking trails, collecting litter, monitoring animal signs, and documenting seasonal changes.

PILLAR 2: OUTDOOR EXPLORATION AND CHILD-LED DISCOVERY

A substantial portion of every session should allow children to decide what to investigate, create, practice, or revisit. Children will have opportunities to:

- Wander and explore within established boundaries
- Follow tracks, sounds, textures, and other natural clues
- Dig, carry, climb, balance, build, collect, sort, and create
- Develop imaginative games inspired by the landscape
- Return to projects across multiple sessions
- Choose whether to work independently, beside another child, or cooperatively
- Share discoveries without every discovery becoming an adult-directed lesson
- Teachers will observe recurring interests and use those observations to prepare future invitations, materials, questions, and experiences

PILLAR 3: SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY

Science will begin with observation and questioning rather than memorization. Children will practice an age-appropriate inquiry cycle:

- 1) Notice something (natural intrigue)
- 2) Ask a question (inquire specifically)
- 3) Share an idea or prediction (based on what they know, make a guess)
- 4) Investigate through observation or experimentation (make and revise predictions)
- 5) Compare what happened with what was hypothesized (distinguish between what they observed and what they imagine or believe)
- 6) Document or communicate the discovery (use simple tools responsibly, journal, draw...)
- 7) Develop a new question (recognize that not knowing is an invitation to investigate)

PILLAR 4: RESILIENCE AND PRODUCTIVE DISCOMFORT

Children will learn that being temporarily cold, wet, muddy, tired, uncertain, frustrated, or unsuccessful does not necessarily mean they are unsafe. The objective is not to make children endure distress, it is to help them distinguish between discomfort and danger, recognize their needs, use available resources, and discover that many challenges are manageable (especially when they learn to be independently responsible with what sets them up for prolonged success - ex. rain boots instead of sneakers/snowpants instead of jeans). Danger requires adult intervention. Manageable discomfort creates an opportunity for growth.

Children will practice:

- Naming physical and emotional sensations
- Assessing situations as uncomfortable, challenging, or unsafe
- Asking for help appropriately
- Adjusting clothing, movement, pace, or strategy
- Persisting through manageable frustration
- Resting and trying again; resilience
- Accepting that outdoor conditions cannot be controlled
- Recovering and pivoting when a plan, structure, experiment, or game does not work
- Supporting peers without taking over

PILLAR 5: SUPPORTED RISK AND PHYSICAL CONFIDENCE

Risk is approached as something children gradually learn to assess - not something adults eliminate entirely. Children will have developmentally appropriate opportunities to:

- Walk on uneven ground
- Balance on logs or rocks
- Climb within defined limits
- Move through snow, mud, water, and brush
- Carry appropriately sized materials
- Build with branches and loose natural parts
- Use real tools following instruction and demonstrated readiness
- Participate in closely supervised fire experiences (building, cooking, heat, dry, etc)
- Notice hazards and contribute to group safety decisions

PILLAR 6: COOPERATIVE PLAY AND COMMUNAL LEARNING

The natural environment provides problems that are often too large or complex for one child to solve alone. Adults will intentionally preserve opportunities for children to negotiate, organize, and collaborate. Adults should intervene when safety requires it, but not automatically resolve every disagreement. Conflict can be an important part of learning to communicate and cooperate.

Children will practice:

- Joining play respectfully
- Listening to other's ideas

- Communicating a plan
- Sharing space, tools, and natural materials
- Assigning and changing roles
- Solving disagreements
- Recognizing when a project requires more help
- Contributing to a common goal
- Balancing leadership with cooperation
- Celebrating group accomplishments

PILLAR 7: INDEPENDENCE AND PRACTICAL LIFE

The program will treat all children as capable contributors to the work of the group. Adults will demonstrate tasks carefully, provide appropriately-sized materials, and gradually withdraw from assistance as competence grows. Children will:

- Pack and carry personal equipment
- Dress for the weather
- Check mittens, hats, water bottles, etc
- Help establish gathering spaces
- Carry tools
- Prepare or serve snacks
- Pour water and clean reusable materials
- Coil rope
- Care for garden areas
- Participate in site cleanup
- Help younger or less experienced peers

PILLAR 8: CREATIVITY, IMAGINATION, AND EXPRESSION

The forest area should remain a place of wonder, imagination, and scientific investigation.

Natural objects should not always be converted into crafts. Children also need opportunities to appreciate, examine, and leave materials where they belong. Children will be invited to:

- Create temporary art from natural materials
- Tell stories connected to places and discoveries
- Engage in dramatic and symbolic play
- Draw, paint, photograph, or model observations
- Make music with found sounds
- Invent games and imaginary worlds
- Dictate stories, theories, and reflections
- Express their emotional experiences of nature

PILLAR 9: STEWARDSHIP AND RECIPROCITY

The program will help children move from enjoying nature to participating responsibly within it. Stewardship should be concrete and hopeful rather than based on fear, guilt, or overwhelming environmental problems. Children will learn to:

- Take only what is abundant and appropriate
- Return displaced habitat materials when possible
- Observe living creatures gently
- Understand why some areas or organisms should not be disturbed
- Reduce waste and care for shared supplies
- Notice signs of human impact
- Participate in simple restoration projects
- Express gratitude for the land, food, water, and living community
- Recognize that caring for a place is an ongoing relationship

CURRICULUM CHART:

<u>Domain</u>	<u>Forest-based experiences</u>
Practical life	Dressing, packing, pouring, food preparation, tool care, gardening, trail care
Sensorial learning	Comparing texture, temperature, weight, color, sound, scent, shape, and moisture
Language and literacy	Nature vocabulary, storytelling, labeling, field guides, songs, oral reports, journals
Mathematics	Counting, sorting, measuring, estimating, patterning, mapping, sequencing, comparing
Life science	Plants, animals, fungi, habitats, life cycles, adaptation, decomposition
Earth and physical science	Weather, water, soil, rocks, force, motion, light, ice, sound
Social-emotional learning	Persistence, self-regulation, confidence, empathy, conflict resolution
Gross and fine motor development	Hiking, climbing, balancing, digging, tying, building, careful tool use
Art and music	Land art, observational drawing, natural pigments, movement, rhythm, found sounds
Grace and courtesy	Trail etiquette, listening, helping, respecting living things, caring for group materials