

What Are Natural Playgrounds?

A natural playground is a play environment that consists of elements and textures from the earth such as tree logs, tree stumps, boulders, plants, and drainage paths, instead of traditional steel playground structures. These natural landscapes lend themselves to providing opportunities for children to play, explore, imagine, and be challenged by the natural elements.

Natural playgrounds enable children to move freely around the environment, allowing them to explore, run, jump, climb, crawl, feel, smell, and more. Studies show that children spend even more time playing outdoors in natural play environments than on traditional playgrounds. Since most natural playgrounds are open, they provide for inclusion of children at all skill levels and abilities to be involved - and encourage children to problem solve and create collaboratively.

The following elements could be created mostly from materials found on-site at Randolph Woods. And in the creative minds of children, they can become so much more than the suggestions given in the captions!

Wood-Based Playthings



MASSIVE BRANCHED LOGS can be tight ropes, trains to ride, or even fantastical creatures to tame - and encourage balancing skills



BURNISHED STICKS make great, safe building materials



A TEEPEE FRAME can be a home, a tower, or a structure to build upon with burnished sticks



WILLOW ARCHES can be caves, tunnels, beehives, or a crystal palace



WATTLE WALLS can be a bird nest, old ruins, or a little piggy home



LOG STUMPS can be steps, rocky cliffs, or a stage

A TREE CANOPY not only provides a shaded place to play, but keeps water cool and creates fractal patterns that mesmerize



Water-Related Playthings

Children, like most humans, love to play in water. Connecting with natural water systems helps children discover the wonders of creatures that live in water, provides opportunities for expanding their imaginary worlds, and gives them the opportunity to splash and stay cool when its hot out.

Smooth pebbles and stones can help protect streambeds from children's play, are fun to step on, and also provide visual clues for where water can be found on site, whether any is currently present or not.



A LOG can be a bridge, a boat, or an aquatic beast - and walking across it can help children improve balance and proprioception

A ROCKY STREAMBED, wet or dry, can be a stone road, a placid moat, a raging river, or a vast ocean. Playing in water helps children value clean waterways



FLIPPING ROCKS improves dexterity while allowing children to discover hidden life



WADING improves balance, provides sensory stimulation, & helps children cool off in hot weather