Roots Forest School

At Ponderosa State Park

ROOTS FOREST SCHOOL

Outdoor preschool at Ponderosa State Park
The sun peaks out from behind the clouds as they slowly move across the sky. The towering tree branches wave like giants and bugs skitter across the warm pavement. Birds sing to their loved ones and stretch their wings while a lazy pup snoozes in the distance. A gentle breeze carries the scent of roses from the garden across the street; a honey bee leaves the hive in search of this fragrant rose.

There is so much movement, so much life that springs anew in the warming sun as winter fades to memory.

Anything was possible here. The creation of magic, mystery, adventure. Becoming pirates, knights, kings, and queens. There was an entire universe of potential that lie within the few square feet that was a backyard. Here many of us played for the first time, unaware that we were learning valuable skills about what it means to be a sentient being, about being human. How the world moves within and around us. How we are part of something larger than ourselves.

And in observing every chirping bird or crawling bug, we are able, as children, to begin to recognize Earth—and learn countless things in the process.

We all grew up somewhere. And it was in these backyards, parks, playgrounds, and sports fields that we started to learn. How to balance, how to identify plants, how to be a teammate, how to use our imaginations…

As children, we often take this time for granted. But as we grow into adolescence and adulthood, we start to realize the vast importance that childhood plays on our development. Case and point: we all need somewhere to play. To run, to dance, to jump, to explore, to discover, to learn.

Stephanie Day took this concept seriously. Inspired by the power of play and the beauty of nature, Stephanie decided to transform the definition of playing outside by opening Roots Forest School, an outdoor preschool for children age 18 months to 5 years.

Imagine all you could learn if your backyard was over 1,000 acres.

That’s some serious adventure.
Mission

“Through child-led adventures, students in Roots Forest School become more connected to our local environment and community. Using place and play-based learning, each child receives a seasonally based educational experience rooted in self-awareness, sensory development, social/emotional skills, and environmental consciousness.”

Ponderosa State Park

One of only 250 outdoor preschools in the United States, Roots Forest School is located at Ponderosa State Park. “[The park] provides the ideal setting for a play and place-based educational experience. Our students have access to 1,500 acres of forests, meadows, marshes, and lake front. Students learn about the place they live by engaging with the natural environment and our community. All of the park’s staff have been incredibly supportive of our program,” says founder, Stephanie Day.

Some of the Programs

“One portion of their day is called 'Walkabout' and it takes place in our 2-acre outdoor forest 'classroom.' During this time they can participate in the stations that are set up around the forest including a building site with real tools for digging/working and loose parts for exploring, the forest kitchen with real pots/pans/utensils for 'cooking,' music area with a three xylophone, library with books to enjoy, forest theater for acting out stories and putting on 'concerts,' and a science center with field guides, binoculars, magnifying glasses, microscopes, journals for making observations, etc. There are also rotating activities out at this time depending on the season such as map exploration, seeds for studying, art projects, etc.”

Another program involves hiking, “We take hikes in different areas of Ponderosa park, the longest hike being a nearly 3-mile trek on the Lily Marsh trail where we pause at the Lily marsh bridge to act out the story of the 3 Billy Goats Gruff.”

As children, most of us spent a lot of time outside. And while the age of information is changing many childhood dynamics, the importance of spending time in nature, especially as children, still stands strong.

An outdoor environment helps children:

- Develop a sense of wonder, a motivating factor for lifelong learning.
- Develop independence by having more space to roam.
- Develop judgement and an ability to assess risk.
- Be stimulated by constantly changing surroundings.
- Spend the day running, jumping, balancing, and climbing – important for developing gross motor skills and core body strength.

Play allows children to:

- Use their creativity while developing dexterity, as well as physical and emotional strength.
- Develop executive function, which is the ability to control and direct emotion and behavior, an indicator of success in school.
- Create a world where they can conquer their fears.
- Enhance their confidence and develop resiliency for future challenges.
- Learn how to work in groups, negotiate, and resolve conflict.

Visit their webpage by clicking here.
If you are interested in learning more about Roots Forest School, visit their webpage at the link above. Roots offers a variety of different levels of classes for your growing child. As the program grows, as does their fundraising and this year they were able to give out $10,000 dollars in scholarships!

Here is a copy of their class schedule for the 2018-2019 school year.

**Parent Toddler Class – Saplings**
This class is designed for toddlers from 18 months to 3 years old, and to be accompanied by a caregiver. We meet every Tuesday for 90 minutes. Parents and toddlers learn, play, and grow together through movement, singing, stories, art, and exploration of the forests.

*$55/month*
5% discount for timely cash or check payment – $50/month

**3/4 Class – Aspens**
This class is designed for preschoolers from 3 to 4 years old. Children attend Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9am – Noon, and we maintain a 1:6 teacher/student ratio. Our Aspens spend much of their class time exploring our forest classroom and the nearby meadows and trails. Students have opportunities to learn through self-directed play and short teacher-led lessons on seasonal themes. Social and emotional skills are practiced through real play experiences with their peers. Literacy and math skills are woven into play, circle time, and seasonal lessons. The abundance of natural materials around us allows for creative art projects incorporating leaves, sticks, cones, needles, and lichen. Your child’s vocabulary, an important piece of early literacy, will grow as she is introduced to our local environment and holds meaningful conversations with teachers and classmates.

*$200/month*
5% discount for timely cash or check payment – $190/month

**4/5 Class – Tamaracks**
This class is designed for preschoolers from 4 to 5 years old. The Tamaracks attend Tues/Wed/Thurs from 1-4pm and we maintain a 1:6 teacher to student ratio. Our Tamaracks spend their class time in both our forest classroom and on group hikes to the lake, marshes, and many hiking trails in Ponderosa State Park. At this age students are able to dig deeper into the science and ecology of the forest around them and make real use of our science and observation tools including microscopes, magnifying glasses, and binoculars. Students are active participants in teacher-led lessons that incorporate literacy, math, science, and art with seasonal happenings in the forest. They are also given time each day to walk about our forest classroom and engage in areas such as the mud kitchen, building site, nature playground, and science center. They learn to work cooperatively, negotiate, and problem solve as they participate in activities of their choice with their peers.

*$245/month*
5% discount for timely cash or check payment – $233/month
3,4, and 5’s – Ponderosa Pines
Our Ponderosa Pines will be a mixed age class of 3-5 year olds attending Mon/Wed/Fri from 9am – Noon. We are eager to implement the mixed age model in our Pines as we have seen the benefits for both the older and younger students in other preschool programs around the state of Idaho and in nature based programs around the United States. As in all of our classes, instruction will be differentiated to meet the individual needs of each student as they prepare to leave forest school and continue their education.

$245/month
5% discount for timely cash or check payment – $233/month
Financial assistance is available for all classes. Scholarship application

Baby Music Class with Shanti Wintergate
Join award winning singer-songwriter and family music maker Shanti Wintergate and her son for a fun, sweet and silly parent and baby sing-a-long class, Tuesdays Nov 27th – Dec 18th in McCall, ID. Class is held at Mountain Dance Unlimited – 1016 N 3rd St, McCall, ID. More information here.
The class is aimed at babies and toddlers under 2 and their caregivers. No experience with the songs or singing necessary, the class environment is designed to be fun and relaxed to encourage experiencing the joy of music with your little one.

$35 for the series
Drop in for $10

Roots Forest School doesn't discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, or national or ethnic background in administration of its education policies, admission policies, scholarship programs, and other school administered programs.

View some photos from their gallery on the next page.