

WILDFLOWERS

NATURE

SCHOOL

PARENT HANDBOOK
For preschool program

2010 • 2011

PROGRAM

PHILOSOPHY

Education has come so far from the original, innate way that humans learned for millennium. With extended family always around in natural settings, kids used to observe, explore, imitate, question, and watch their mentors in a natural setting. They learned by discovery, experimentation and very keen awareness. At Wildflowers Nature School, we try to allow the space for that unfolding of inquisitiveness and exploration, for experiencing the wonder and the spirit in special moments in nature. For in those moments lies the heart of education that will last a lifetime.

VISION STATEMENT

Running with the natural exuberant wonder of a child, we nurture academic inquisitiveness, confidence, imagination, creativity, and a connection to, gratitude for and understanding of the world around them. This will become a solid place within each child that they can continually return to for growth, values, compassion, wisdom and joy in their lives. By fostering a love of nature, these children will naturally adopt practices of stewardship, sustainability and respect for the beauty and fragility of the planet.

PROGRAM

We serve ages 2 ½ to 6 in our preschool. As a full preschool program, we generally have about 50-60 minutes indoors, including make-believe, life skills, math & language & science materials, crafts, projects, etc. We then spend the remainder of our day outdoors, where we have circle and snack time, explore the natural world, care for animals or plants (gardening, etc.), find critters and tracks, do native or nature art and crafts, science experiments, immerse in imaginative play, and develop a keen use of our senses. On Tuesdays, 3-5 kids per week prepare food using as much from our gardens or wildlands here as possible. Math and Spanish are integrated into our snack time and occasionally in circle time. Music is integrated throughout the daily activities and further explored in circle time, learning rhythm, occasionally dance, performing individually if desired, sharing music from visiting musicians, etc.

CATERING TO THE INDIVIDUAL

We have a tremendous respect for the essence of many styles of education, including Waldorf and Montessori, and incorporate apparatus from many disciplines into the classroom. Each child is accommodated according to the child's nature, the parent's philosophy, and where the child will be going to school when they leave here. Some kids are driven to read at barely 4 without prompting and others are not very interested until age 6. Most this age spend a lot of time immersed with friends in imaginary play, learning cooperation and critical social skills. We honor the interests of each child and what is important to each family. By using Maria Montessori's concept of a "prepared environment", children can choose work here according to their interests and developmental readiness.

SCHEDULE

On Mondays and Wednesdays, school is open 9-3 and on Tuesdays and Thursdays, school is open 9-1. Afterschool care is a possibility, so let us know your needs. A typical cool season schedule on Tuesdays and Thursdays would be:

9-10 Indoor work.

10-10:15 Prep for outside: potty, wash hands, put on shoes & coats, etc.

10:25-10:40 Healthy snack.

10:40-11 Circle time.

11 -12:00 Outdoor exploration and projects.

12:00-12:45 Set table, eat, wash dishes.

12:45-1 Storytelling or book and "story of the day".

1pm Parents pick up kids.

In warm weather we spend from 11-12 inside and from 9-10 outside. On Mondays and Wednesdays, we offer an afternoon program for non-nappers. We generally have a snack at 1:30. At about 2pm, we usually lay down for ½ hour (on a blanket outside in good weather or in the Imagination Room if poor weather) while the kids and teacher take turns telling stories. Sometimes the teacher tells or reads a story or we do a special project instead of rest. Then we either have free play or gardening or do a project or go exploring.

Wednesdays are our "Focus Days." Kids will have a longer work period to focus on projects, crafts, academic development, science experiments, or a deeper level in their imaginative or creative play. We usually have a brief circle inside that's based on introduction of work, instead of our general circle outside, and snack is a self-serve "work". We usually hold the extra 20 minutes or so this creates indoors, but may spend it on a special outdoor project.

CALENDAR

School is open 142 days. Conference times and teacher workdays are done without any reduction in school schedule. We operate on a modified year-round schedule, starting in early August, ending in mid to late June, with four 2 week breaks. We've reduced the standard 3 month summer vacation to 2. This enables families to take some time off at our most beautiful times of the year instead of always summer. It's best for kids to have a deep experience of all seasons. We strongly encourage camping in each season, as family camping probably provides more opportunities for children to connect with nature than any other activity. We humbly acknowledge that not all families have very much time off, but hopefully at least a long weekend in each season can be arranged to get out and experience the outdoors as a family.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

CLOTHING

This is an outdoor-based program. It is absolutely imperative that you provide the proper clothing for us, as we will be sure your child is protected from the elements. We may adjust our outside time to accommodate the weather, possibly switching to a different time of day or shortening it. But we spend time outside EVERY DAY, rain or shine, freezing or blazing. Please either send your child with or leave with us: 1. a real winter jacket, hat & gloves in the winter, 2. waterproof raincoat and rainpants if there's fog or chance of rain, 3. rubber boots every day, 4. shorts & t-shirt or summer dress, swimsuit & sunhat if it's going to be warm, and 5. at least one (preferably 2) full changes of clothes every day. Warning: mud play is core to the natural experience of children exploring nature. We send home muddy clothes about once a week in good weather. A winter jacket is not just a fleece jacket or a lined raincoat. It should have a good deal of padding to insulate the child from cold. Hiking boots or workboots are great when it's not too wet outside, as kids can avoid wet feet in morning dew or when watering the garden, but still have good agility to climb trees and run. Long underwear underneath clothes is a good idea during cold snaps here. We will assume that if you want sunscreen on your child, you will do so before dropping him/her off, as we are not allowed to apply it. PLEASE LABEL EVERYTHING they bring to school. We will provide a box for a full change of clothes that need to be here. Check their box once a week to make sure you didn't forget to replace spares that came home. Second-hand stores and garage sales should have most everything above except rainpants. If you're having trouble locating or affording any of these items, do not hesitate to ask for advice. I have a few extra pairs of rainboots I can donate.

WATER, HATS, GLOVES

Each child should have a water bottle that will not drip when on it's side and have their name on the bottom in permanent marker. When arriving, please put water bottle and any hats (sun or warm) or gloves you wish your child to wear that day into the basket by the door. If you choose to leave those items here, we'll put on their hats/gloves as needed & keep water bottles in basket and wash and fill as needed.

HANDWASHING and POTTYING PROCEDURES

Please assist your children with washing their hands upon arrival and departure. This is very effective to limit the transmission of disease at preschools. (Publicly funded preschools require this now – fyi). If we are starting the day outside, please have them use the toilet before handwashing and dropping them off to us.

POTTY TRAINING

By the beginning of school, we ask that children be potty trained and comfortable using the toilet away from home. All the kids sit on the toilet when we do our routine before going outside each day. We will assist your child in preventing accidents with gentle reminders, routines, & expectations. It is recommended to keep one spare set of clothing here (including socks & shoes) in addition to the daily change you bring.

FORMS

The following forms must be kept on file and parent is responsible for updating when necessary: 1. Registration Form, 2. Health & Safety Information, 3. Immunization Record (blue card), 4. Consent for Emergency Medical Treatment, 5. Contract & Waiver (which references Calendar & this document), 6. Identification and Emergency Information, 7. Acknowledgement of receipt of: "Notification of Parents' Rights", "Caregiver Background Check Process," and "Consumer Awareness Information."

TICKS

Of course, a school with a focus on nature is going to spend time daily in wild natural areas. Please check your child EVERY SINGLE DAY when your child returns home. Long pants with tick repellent on them add protection. Deer ticks are extremely small. Ask us for a "tick card" if you aren't positive how to ID them. If you find a tick, take it to Sonoma County Health Dept for test and let us know results, please. If it bit your child (or you), get antibiotics from your Dr. ASAP.

DROP-OFF & PICK-UP PROCEDURE

Drop-off is at 9am. Pick-up is at 1pm in our outdoor area, unless it's raining. Routines are important to kids, so we will be working on a smooth start & end at 9am & 1pm. Please NEVER drop off or pick up a child without signing in or out. Please remind anyone else who is driving to sign in & out. Visual or verbal acknowledgement by a staff member is required upon delivery of children. Process: Please follow handwash/potty routine above, sign child in on the sign-in sheet indoors, put lunchbox on shelf (outdoor shelf if we start outside) and deliver children to us. If you bring hats, gloves, or water bottles home, please put them in the appropriate basket upon arrival. Do read blackboard, as that's where we put important messages for the day.

PARKING

Wildflowers is located on a private drive that is shared with 2 other households. PLEASE, for this program to continue, it is imperative that everyone give the neighbors the utmost respect by driving slowly and only parking in the driveway area of the school. Please pull as far in as possible to allow for the other cars to park in our driveway. Please don't park along the shared driveway. Use pullouts or back up whenever you see a car coming the other way. Carpooling is strongly encouraged and financially rewarded (see tuition rate chart). Apples, grapes, & raspberries on driveway belong to neighbors. Lastly, but most important, be VERY CAREFUL pulling in & out, as children are hard to see. Keep children close to you when walking so that they are safe at pick-up & drop-off times.

PICK-UP AUTHORIZATION

Children can only go home with people who are listed on the "Identification and Emergency Information" form. In the event of an emergency, people will be contacted in the order in which you list them on the form (check box 1 or 2 next to parent info if you have a preference which parent to call 1st). If I haven't met one of these authorized people, please present me with a photo of them ahead. If someone's not on this list, we will not be able to release your child to them unless it is amended by you in writing. Children will be released to parents only, even if a person is listed here, unless we have express permission for him/her to be picked up by one of these authorized people for that specific day or in case of an emergency. Appropriate car seats are required by everyone driving a child that still legally requires it to or from school or any school event.

COMMUNICATION

A sign-in sheet will be out for each day. But personal info that might be needed on some days, such as whether a child didn't eat breakfast, had a "melt-down", stayed up very late the night before, has a runny nose, etc. is best communicated verbally with us. If anything major (such as divorce, death in the family, etc.), please try to contact the day before school. It can be hard to pay full attention when parents are coming & going at drop-off time.

CONFERENCES

Parent-teacher conferences are encouraged at least twice a year. It is recommended that both parents attend and children do not, so please plan ahead for child care. We can help with names and numbers for child care if you need them. We'll have a sign-up sheet out with slots to sign up for in September and January. Please do feel free to schedule a conference at any time during the year, though. Often the best time to discuss how your child is doing is not exactly at conference times.

CHATTING

Having time for parents and teachers to chat is important in keeping an ongoing open communication process so that we are a team educating and caring for your child here. Having time for parents to chat with each other can be an important part of building community. But please keep 4 things in mind: 1. Never speak about sensitive matters or children in front of children. 2. Unless it's important about that very day, please reserve chatting with teachers for after school and reserve any morning chatting with parents to outside of the area we are settling kids in (outside if we are starting in classroom, in parking lot after dropping kids off in schoolyard if we're starting outside). At the beginning of school, it is best to help the focus be on helping children to settle in. 3. Any time you want a longer period to talk about something important, it's best to schedule some time together.

COMMUNITY

We plan on having family celebrations and special events, such as campouts, field trips, cookouts, apple pressing / harvest festival, community work days, solstice / equinox season celebrations. There will also be occasional workshops, parent nights, and events. Please write the dates from our calendar (attached) onto yours, as it is important in building community that the most people attend as possible. More events will be added during the year.

VOLUNTEERING

The garden and nature space are a very important part of your child's program here. Though preschoolers love to play in the dirt and plant seeds, their contribution to the totality of care needed for a flourishing garden and play areas are limited. Parents are encouraged to attend the community work days, both to help create a flourishing environment for your child and to create a sense of community. By building our space together, we can build a group of families raising kids together. Field trips are also important and we need parents to help with driving. Permission slips for field trips are mandatory & copies should be carried by drivers. Offers to volunteer, whether during school to help with the children, or during non-school hours to assist with projects here, are warmly welcomed.

ILLNESS

If a child has had any of the following symptoms in the last 24 hours before a school morning, please don't bring them to school: fever, vomiting, upset stomach, stomach ache, sore throat, sneezing, wheezing, eye or nose drainage, diarrhea, skin problems, body aches, or any other symptom you think might indicate they are just coming down with something. If child shows any of those signs of illness at school, we will call parents to come pick up their child. IF a child's only symptom is a runny nose and/or a dry cough, AND they've had it for more than 2 days, it's OK to bring them. If medication is necessary for your child, there is a state form to fill out before we are allowed to administer it. If there have been contagious illnesses recently in your household, please inform us (including flu, etc.).

SAYING GOODBYE

It can be a delicate issue for some children whether their parent stays for a while and how much. If a child does not know when the parent is leaving, there can be constant stress waiting for that moment and he/she may never fully settle. If you have a child who may have concern about your departure, let's make a plan together ahead. The most important thing is to tell your child exactly what will happen and then do exactly that. Let them learn how to let go and find their rhythm here, make friends, and find their favorite things to do at school, while letting them know you have confidence that they will do fine. Weekly conferences in those 1st weeks are fine if you or your child has concerns. Every child is different. Together, we can make a plan that works for your child.

SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS and RATIO

Usually we have 9-12 preschoolers and 2 teachers. We are planning this year to have 1 morning a week in which we have 6 preschoolers with one teacher and up to 8 elementary aged kids doing homeschool enrichment with the other teacher. Anytime we have 6 kids or less, we may have only one teacher on duty with the children. Occasions such as illness, important continuing education events, family emergencies, etc. may arise that would require a teacher to be away. We have a list of qualified substitutes that have the qualifications, background check and experience to provide your child with good care.

FOOD

We will have a snack calendar for the month whereby parents rotate turns for bringing healthy snack on Mondays, Tuesdays & Thursdays. Snack is provided by school on Wednesdays. The attached handout on "Sustainable Eating Practices" should be examined to adhere to the philosophies of our program. On Mondays, Wednesdays & Thursdays, children bring his/her lunch in non-disposable containers and lunch container that is re-usable and has no advertisements or licensed characters or intense graphics on them (baskets with lids, zip-arounds, cloth, etc.). Please try to send zero waste lunches (such as small bottles of juice or milk instead of juice boxes, raisins in a washable container instead of individual raisin boxes, etc.). Any waste coming with child will go home with child. On Tuesdays kids will take turns in the kitchen preparing a communal meal from local, organic sources, including from the garden the kids grow (included in rate).

BIRTHDAYS AND HOLIDAYS

We will have celebrations of gratitude, seasons, and the cycle of life, as well as explore many holiday traditions from cultures around the world. As is a Montessori tradition, each child on their birthday will carry a globe around a "sun" (usually a candle) for each year they are born. Family members are welcome to be present for the celebration. Snack that day can be brought by the birthday child's family, but please leave out sugar and refined flour.

TOYS FROM HOME

To avoid conflicts, we ask that toys from home stay home. Your child's snack day is your child's "show and tell" day. On that day, the child can bring in items that teach us something (nature items, unique pets, books, small machines, antiques, musical instruments, etc.). Small items from the natural world belonging to the season we are celebrating (or to all seasons) can be donated or loaned to our Nature Shelves/Table at any time and/or shared in circle.

TV & VIDEO

Children under 7 naturally confuse reality with fantasy. Disturbing or over-exciting scenes are often acted out in order to deal with them. This is an age of imitation. **TV viewing children DO really affect the school environment and other children.** Their fantasy focuses on TV characters. We request families to be careful about selecting quality & quantity of media for children.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

TUITION

Our tuition is an annual fee, payable in ten installments (Aug.-May) or all at once (latter gets 6% discount). We have structured our tuition based on whether the child is brought in a carpool or not. Carpooling is important in respecting the neighbors and is in keeping with our philosophy of contributing to a sustainable society. If one family drops off & picks up another family's child, that's a "2 car pool" and both families get the discount. Tuition goes down with the number of cars you take off the road. You will choose the tuition plan that best matches your guess as to how much carpooling you will do. (If a custom plan is needed, we can create one). Otherwise, the rate will be in our original contract according to the carpool plan you choose, so billing will not be necessary. If you need to choose a different carpool plan, let me know & we can change it mid-year, with the associated adjustment in tuition. Ask if you have any questions or special requests, such as monthly receipts. Remember to talk to your tax adviser about child care tax credits. If your family is low income (or lower middle income in Sebastopol or Graton), ask about local programs that assist families with child care costs. Occasionally there are work trade opportunities, so ask if interested.

REGISTRATION FEE

In keeping with standard local practice, we do ask for a one-time \$160 registration fee in only the child's first year. Returning students (students who paid that fee the prior year) do not need to pay this fee again. We do not charge a separate materials fee. This can be paid with August payment.

LAST MONTH'S INSTALLMENT = DEPOSIT

Once a full month's installment (or equal to it if planning to pay year in full) is paid, space is reserved for your child. This installment will be applied to the May 2011 installment or to the annual tuition if the year is paid in full at the beginning of the year. If you need to space this out over a couple of months, do not hesitate to ask.

SIBLINGS

Siblings in the same program and time length receive 10% off tuition for the 2nd child. Registration fee for siblings is 50% off (\$80).

RETURNING FAMILIES DISCOUNTS

Families who had a child here in our 1st year get a "Founding Families" discount, and can use our 2009-2010 rate schedule for all their children. Families who have had children here in other past years can apply a 10% discount.

ADMISSION PROCEDURE

On April 20th, we will begin choosing next year's class. We will announce our class list on about May 1st and the remainder of people will be offered a place on the waitlist.

SUBJECT TO SIGN-UP

If not enough children are signed up for a particular slot (for instance, 1-3pm Monday or...), we reserve the right to cancel that option or offer it at a higher rate.

LATE PAYMENT FEE

Tuition paid after 10th of the month incurs 10% late charge.

AFTER-SCHOOL CARE

After-school care must be previously arranged & is not always available. Rate will be \$12/ hour per child or \$9/hour each for 2 children or more (related or not).

LATE PICK-UP FEE

If parents pick up their child more than 20 minutes late without previous arrangement, they may be billed \$15 every 30 minutes they are late. If parents are more than 20 minutes late without previous arrangement more than 5 times in a school year, provider has the option of terminating this contract.

TERMINATION OF CONTRACT

This arrangement can be terminated either by mutual consent, or by either party if safety or well-being of any child is at risk or if other party does not uphold the responsibilities contained herein. In these cases, refund of tuition will be given on a pro-rated basis, though deposit will not be refunded. For other reasons, such as but not limited to, changing mind, going on vacation, etc., responsibility for remaining installments of annual tuition are still due and payable.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

WILDFLOWERS NATURE SCHOOL

2010-11 RATES FOR PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

	NO CARPOOL	2 CAR POOL	3 CAR POOL	PEDESTRIAN
9-1 : 4 days				
Yearly tuition	5450	4905	4633	4360
Monthly installment (10)	545	491	463	436
Year pd by 8/9/10 (6% off)	5123	4611	4355	4098
9-1: 3 days				
Yearly tuition	4200	3780	3570	3360
Monthly installment (10)	420	378	357	336
Year pd by 8/9/10 (6% off)	3948	3553	3356	3158
9-1: 2 days				
Yearly tuition	3400	3060	2890	2720
Monthly installment (10)	340	306	289	272
Year pd by 8/9/10 (6% off)	3196	2876	2717	2557
add on 1-3pm: 2 days				
Yearly tuition	1450	1305	1233	1160
Monthly installment (10)	145	131	123	116
Year pd by 8/9/10 (6% off)	1363	1227	1159	1090
4 days: 2 from 9-1 & 2 from 9-3				
Yearly tuition	6200	5580	5270	4960
Monthly installment (10)	620	558	527	496
Year pd by 8/9/10 (6% off)	5828	5357	4954	4662