



Welcome to Cottonwood Hollow...

On the south-side of Columbus, a creek winds through an old cottonwood forest. There are no through roads here, but you'll find a row of homes with lucky owners, whose backyards butt up against the forest, or in our case, include the forest. You may hear the sounds of baby hawks, or the chirp of spring peepers, while in this little oasis of forest in the city that we call Cottonwood Hollow.

We have curated this magical patch of forest to create safe spaces for children to feel home in, while providing opportunities for exploration. We hope to nurture your child in this space where so many things grow, allowing them to feel at home in the natural world.

What is a nature preschool?

Most preschools and traditional public schools allow for less than an hour of outdoor time per day. However, research suggests that outdoor play provides rich opportunities for physical development, creative problem solving, and a understanding of place in the world. Nature preschools have cropped up in response to this, using the outdoor space as the main classroom. We learn about animals by identifying the ones that frequent the forest canopy and mimic their songs. We plant seeds and water them from our harvested rainwater, and see science come to life. The trees that surround the play space are characters in each season of our life, dropping black walnuts in the fall and cottonwood fluff in the spring. The surrounding environment is a tool for learning and for connection. Using what is around us, we weave in Ohio Early Learning Standards. These have been proven to be of utmost importance at the ages of 3-5.

In Home Care

We operate the nature preschool out of our home and property, which we call Cottonwood Hollow, for the towering cottonwoods that dot our acre of land. In home care is common for day cares and can count as preschool as well. We will start out as a Type B In Home Childcare Provider and work towards being a licensed, Type A In Home Childcare Provider. In the meantime we are following all of the protocol of a licensed provider, which you can learn more about on our website.

Our home is small but mighty, and we have built out and finished our walk-out basement into an indoor space for a class of 6 children ages 2-5. There is a side door entrance that goes directly down to the basement, where parents will pick up and drop off their child. Our outdoor space is completely fenced in, sits on a hill and features a large garden, ducks, chickens, forested play space, and a creek. We keep all parts of our home safe and up to the licensing code, but kids will not be permitted upstairs unless they are with a staff when they are using the bathroom.

Because it is in home care, there are times the children may see James, Miss Sarah's partner and Cottonwood Hollow's groundskeeper. He works with kids outside the home as well, but will generally be at work during the school hours.

Our Mission and Philosophy

Mission:

Cottonwood Hollow Nature Preschool provides children access to nature in the city. Using the forest and homestead as a tool for learning, physical development, and mindfulness, children grow an understanding of the natural world, and their place in it.

Philosophy:

- **We operate with little to no screen time, giving children the opportunity to have a respite from the technology surrounding us in this current climate.** This allows for more creative, sensory experiences that emphasize movement. These experiences are a huge part of developing fine motor skills, creative problem solving, and bodily control at this age and are part of daily life at the school.

- **We believe children should have hands-on experiences with nature to understand themselves, others and the world.** We believe in providing children the opportunity to safely interact with farm animals, gardening, cooking and native plants with the supervision of teachers. The caring and observing of these living beings helps children to develop empathy, a sense of responsibility and wonder for the natural world.
- **We emphasize the importance of mental wellness, loving yourself and loving others.** There are many beautiful metaphors for this in nature. Nature can be a teacher in that way, and at this age we learn to name emotions, and voice our feelings to each other in a safe space.
- **We are a place of community and inclusivity.** All are welcome and the preschoolers will practice hospitality within the classroom by learning how to include others and create a safe space. We will also seasonally come up with a project to serve the community together.
- **We believe that children need free play in outdoor environments.** We prioritize part of every day for child-led, supervised, unstructured play. This is balanced with structured, teacher-led activities that incorporate Ohio Early Learning Standards.
- **We believe in preparing children for kindergarten by weaving the Ohio Early Learning Standards into our activities outdoors.** Academics are not the only thing important here, and is often secondary to social, emotional and physical development.
- **We practice Conscious Discipline.** Used in schools and organizations nationwide, Dr. Becky Bailey's Conscious Discipline focuses on helping the child name their emotion, and sitting with them through that experience, while providing clarity around boundaries. More information can be found on our website. Miss Sarah has participated in the training and used it in previous schools, and any volunteers are educated on the basics before working with the kids.

Our Curriculum

Our curriculum is inspired by a collection of educational philosophies, including Montessori, Reggio-Emilia and Waldorf philosophies. We aim to weave in the best practices of these philosophies into our learning environment, which broadly includes an emergent curriculum, learning through story, and daily rhythms. We do this while also following Ohio Early Learning Standards. Here's an example of how we design an emergent curriculum.

*Scenario: The children see a garden snake during outdoor play and the class quickly becomes obsessed with snakes. This an opportunity to create an emergent curriculum! See below how snakes become the vehicle to learn many things, and children are more invested than ever!



Daily Rhythms

Young children thrive in structure. It is a way to set expectations and create comfort and familiarity. We strive to uphold these rhythms while being flexible when needed, because life happens. As long as the rhythm flows similarly each day.

Drop off:

This is time for children to slowly wake up a bit and play in the indoor classroom until all the students arrive. It is essentially a free play with offerings, indoors.

Snack:

Each morning after drop off, we will make sure to direct the kids towards a soft start activity. Once all children have arrived, we will start preparing snack with those children interested in helping, and make sure those who need to go to the toilet before we go outside. We will eat snack, then head outdoors! On warmer days this will all happen outside.

Walkabout:

Each morning after drop off, we will make the move from indoor to outdoor and walk down to the play field. In this walk, we will make sure to notice the growth on the trees, or garden plants, any animals or signs of their presence, and the weather. This is an easy mindfulness activity that incorporates some learning about our natural environment.

Morning Circle:

This is when we will sit together and check in, talk about what we saw in the walkabout, and how it feels outside. We will sing a morning song. We may read a story relevant to the season or activities upcoming, or act out a movement story. This time is to create community ritual, and helps children be aware of what to expect from the day. It also allows them a chance to share with the group how they are feeling, what they noticed, which may spark some interesting emergent themes.

Animal and Garden care:

Children will rotate 'jobs' during this time of the day, working in couples. Some kids will feed the chickens and ducks, others will collect eggs, others will harvest tomatoes or water plants.

This helps the children feel they are a part of the homestead and feel ownership and connection to the plants and animals.

Outdoor free play:

Outdoor free play is when the class has a choice of what they'd like to do within the outdoor play space. It allows the child to lead and is one of the largest parts of the day. Research shows that outdoor free play is crucial for physical, social and mental developmental milestones. It is also an important part of our program, as children get to experience the space and explore it in their own way.

Structured Activity:

This activity will be hands on and prepared by staff ahead of time, and will use nature to incorporate various Early Learning Standards. It could be related to number sense, and we build mud pies with Ms. Sarah's famous recipe, or it could be a physical game of red light green light, where kids have to identify colors of plants. This is a portion of the day that is more teacher-led and may also be occupied with a music or art enrichment activity.

Meal time:

Meal time is a time to sit together and have conversations or listen to music, maybe a story. The children will participate in making part of the meal at least once a week. This will last about 20 minutes, and clean up will be a part of it, to keep in the habit

Nap time and pick up:

This is time for children to wind down and nap before pick up, and will happen either in the bell tent or in the house. It will be an hour and is important in allowing children to rest after a busy morning.

Policies and Procedures

Meals

We will serve snack and lunch to your child for half day students. We offer prepared lunches for an extra cost. We emphasize fresh, healthy, often home-grown ingredients and variety. We consult the recommended daily dietary allowance for children. Snacks come with the cost of tuition and we use them as a place for kids to try new things, often that they've helped grow. If your child has allergies to food or sensitivities, talk to us so we can try to accommodate them, within reason. Otherwise, they will need to bring their own food from home. We are a home operation and are not a nut-free facility, so those with fatal nut allergies may not be a good fit.

Medications and Immunizations

Staff will be sure to administer medication or care procedures necessary per parent instruction and consent for any child with disabilities during care. If this applies for your child, you will need to fill out a form.

Children and staff will need to be fully immunized from Chicken pox, Diphtheria, Haemophilus influenzae type b, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Measles, Mumps, Pertussis, Pneumococcal disease, Poliomyelitis, Rotavirus, Rubella, Tetanus to attend or work at Cottonwood Hollow.

Pick up and Drop off

We do staggered pick up and drop off times to create less traffic on the street. You will be notified of your group when we respond to your registration after enrollment. The drop off times are between 7:45AM and 8:30AM, and the pick up times are between 1PM and 1:30PM. We ask that parents communicate if they will be later for drop off or earlier for pick up or they will incur a fee. If you must pick your child up earlier than their drop off time consistently, you are welcome to, but please communicate this so we know what to expect. You will not be reimbursed for picking up your child early as we do not pro-rate per hour.

Financial Policies

- Full Day: \$80/day
- Half Day: \$60/day

Cottonwood Hollow offers half day and full day programming. We are a nature preschool but also provide 8 hours of programming and child care to accommodate working families. Therefore our costs mimic nearby full time daycares and preschools, with a smaller class size and emphasis on the outdoors. We have hopes of raising money for a few scholarships based on need, and if that interests you please contact Miss Sarah.

Payment Methods

Tuition will be paid monthly. There are a couple options for how to pay the tuition. Many of the online portals for transferring money have a significant fee for the business-owner. Zelle is the least expensive of these, and is compatible with our bank. You may choose to pay with Zelle each month, set up an automated wire transfer with your bank account, or give us a physical check. We will talk through how to go about this after you've enrolled.

Care Contract

It's our intention to create a consistent community and minimize change. At enrollment we will ask that you commit by signing a care contract with the opportunity to renew or cancel after 3 months. By signing your child up and paying our monthly cost, you are saving their spot in class. When starting, you must commit to at least 3 months with us, to give your family a full idea of how the child integrates with our school, and to minimize change in the classroom.

Sick policy

We ask parents to not bring their child to school if they have had a fever or vomitted in the last 24 hours. We also ask that they don't bring their child to school if they have tested positive for COVID-19. Once their test is negative, they can come back. As of now we do not require masks at Cottonwood Hollow, though we keep an eye on the CDC's guidelines. We will respect your decision to mask or unmask your child. Sick staff will also be asked to stay home with the same symptoms, and a sub will be present in their place.

When you pay for monthly care, be informed that your price will not change if the child is out sick or for other plans. The cost is to save your spot and we do not refund money for days absent. Contact Miss Sarah in extenuating circumstances.

Risks and forest play

Our outdoor play area is fenced in, and we do our best to supervise your child in specific, fenced in areas during the day. We have a creek at the end of the hill, which is fenced off. Some risk is inherent to forest play. We try our best to eliminate any high risk scenarios that would occur, but here are some risks to be aware of:

- Poison ivy: We do not have poison ivy on most of the property and where we do we have gone through eradication efforts. However, it is still present and therefore a slight risk.
- Bug bites and ticks: We have never seen ticks on the property, but it doesn't mean they are not there. Mosquitoes are mostly a problem come summer, but could be present in late spring.
- Weather: Please make sure to refer to our gear list and dress your child weather-appropriate, as we will be outside almost every day, for most of the day. That being said, we are not a military school, and will go inside in extreme cases or if there is much discomfort.

Emergencies

If your child experiences a medical emergency, we will call 911 and have an ambulance come, and immediately contact parents thereafter. We will get your consent beforehand to do so in a form, and that consent is required to attend our school. Our staff is trained in CPR and first aid for children, and will do our best to care for the child until emergency services come.

Weather-related Policies and Closures

We will close the school for snow days when Columbus public schools are closed, and go indoors when lightning is present. We will take shelter in an interior basement room during severe thunderstorm or tornado warnings. If temperatures are under 18 degrees we will operate indoors. If temperatures are above 100 degrees we will operate indoors or use water play to cool off. We will also take shelter inside if there is extreme wind, or dangerous air quality.

Student Teacher Ratios:

We will maintain a minimum of 6:1 child to teacher ratio, and work towards a 4:1 ratio from our opening. Our staff will be supervising children the entire time in our care, and we will go together to the bathroom inside when playing outside in groups of 6.

Volunteering

Parents are welcome to volunteer during hours of operation, and encouraged to do so! In fact, anyone can volunteer at Cottonwood Hollow who is willing to meet Miss Sarah and get a background check. Other ways to be involved or help out include contributing to materials needed for the year, volunteering time and skills to the play space.

Parent-Teacher meetings

Our belief is that relationships are the foundation for learning and community. We value clear and open communication between parents and teachers. Every month, we send out an email with a collection of photos, art, and observations of your child to keep you in the loop with their development and the classes' projects. At the end of the year, we will meet and talk about your child. However, if you'd like to meet with Miss Sarah additionally outside of care hours to discuss your child that can be arranged.

If your child is exhibiting consistent behavioral challenges, we may approach you about scheduling a meeting to move forward with a plan of action with your child. We do not suspend children at Cottonwood Hollow. However, in extreme circumstances we may have to reevaluate whether they are a good fit for this environment.

Age Policy

We accept children ages 2-5 years old. Your child must be two years old by the first day of school in September. Two year olds will start out attending 1 half day a week, on Wednesdays, for the first 3 months.

Toileting

We require children be potty trained in order to attend Cottonwood Hollow. If there are extenuating circumstances we can evaluate this on a case-by-case basis.

Pets

We have two friendly large dogs, but they will not be in the home during the preschool hours due to their very excitable nature. However, our home does have dog hair if that is an allergen concern.

We are considering having our neighbor dog sit, and at times use our garage to house the dogs for parts of the day. Please let us know your child's comfort level with dogs so we can keep this mind while we refine this particular part of the daily flow.

Security

Our home is surrounded by a privacy fences from the street, and the gates are the only way to enter the backyard other than coming from inside the house. We also have security cameras at the front and sides of the home equipped with motion detection so we can know what is going on even when we are way in the back yard. While we have had no prior incidents with crime in the neighborhood, we want to make sure the place is secure for your child. Our policy is to keep front and side doors locked, as well as the gates. Parents will be given a gate code for ease.

Staff

In accordance with Ohio licensing requirements, staff must pass a background check to work at Cottonwood Hollow. We also check references and care greatly to hire those with the highest quality of character. We have a list of substitute teachers that help us run the school if Miss Sarah or her staff is sick or on taking time off. If you'd be interested, we are always looking to have more subs in our back pocket. All that is needed is a background check and read through of the staff manual.

Contact

Miss Sarah carries a fanny pack with a charged phone on her at all times during school hours, and an hour before school session. Please contact her with any short notice absences, emergencies or changes to the pick up/drop off schedule. Otherwise, email **cottonwoodhollowhomestead@gmail.com** to keep us in the loop about family vacations or any other discussion topics you had in mind. You can expect a response during work hours M-F.