

Miss Maple's



Nature House

FAMILY HANDBOOK & POLICIES

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FAMILY HANDBOOK & POLICIES

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to **Miss Maple's Nature House!**

Where Kids, Plants and Animals Live Happily Ever After!

Offering nature-based, childcare programs dedicated to supporting the whole child and their developmental needs, while fostering a love for the natural world.

It is our mission to provide all children with the opportunity to experience and cultivate healthy relationships with nature, community and self, without regard to physical, mental, or socio-economic status.



Our exclusive program takes place outdoors on our 2-acre property, in our nature-inspired indoor spaces, and in various other outdoor spaces in our community. Our incredible Guides provide engaging activities including live animal encounters, trail hikes, art projects, games, songs, and stories. *Miss Maple's* is designed to help your child develop cognitive and problem-solving skills, while cultivating social skills and building confidence. We teach respect for all living beings and how to minimize our impact on the earth. Our lessons flow organically from what nature presents us with each day.

We know that every family is unique, and each has its own schedules and needs, and we strive to offer programs to fit your family's needs. Our childcare is licensed by the Maine State Child & Family Services. Staff/child ratios will always meet licensing regulations. Staff will always have a cell phone, drinking water, and a first aid kit with them.

Our OUTDOOR SPACES are PERFECT for LEARNING and NATURE PLAY

At *Miss Maple's Nature House*, we immerse ourselves in the great outdoors as much as possible.



Whether visiting the chickens, wandering in The Meadow, or concocting in Mud Kitchen, children freely roam and play. Trails in The Beyond are well-marked for our woodland adventures and lead to many favorite places to linger and explore! From seeds and sprouts to tracks and scat, surprises always await. We also have the indoor spaces of *Miss Maple's Nature House* - warm, inviting, and full of nature-based fun.

CORE ROUTINES of NATURE CONNECTIONS ... things people do to learn nature's ways.

Each day we'll strive to practice as many of the 13 Core Routines as we can. In this way, we teach and learn to connect more deeply and naturally to the world around us. These Core Routines were developed by the Wilderness Awareness School under the guidance of Jon Young, author and naturalist (who was mentored by tracker Tom Brown Jr., who was in turn taught by Stalking Wolf, an Apache elder) and are used here as a trusted framework for our daily activities



- 1) SIT SPOT
- 2) STORY OF THE DAY
- 3) EXPANDING OUR SENSES
- 4) QUESTIONING & TRACKING
- 5) ANIMAL FORMS
- 6) WANDERING
- 7) MAPPING
- 8) EXPLORING FIELD GUIDES
- 9) JOURNALING
- 10) SURVIVAL LIVING
- 11) MIND'S EYE IMAGINING
- 12) LISTENING FOR BIRD LANGUAGE
- 13) THANKSGIVING

RHYTHM OF OUR DAY

An underlying structure, referred to as our “daily rhythm”, provides a flexible structure so children know what to expect during their time at *Miss Maple's*. This comforting rhythm includes visual and auditory cues when transitions take place and are not set in stone. We don't arbitrarily cut learning short for the sake of a schedule – except to go home!

Arrival & Welcome	Grown-ups bring their children in and sign the roster. ¹ Children explore simple provocations in the various rooms/areas with tools, art materials, natural artifacts, or books, etc. which rotate throughout the year.
Gathering Circle	We begin with a welcome song, Gratitude's, and yoga movement followed by children's sharing time. Intentional activities are led by guides to build on children's interests and seasonal happenings. This time may include stories, movement, song, experiments, dramatic play, artifact sharing, etc.
Sit Spot	Children participate in their “sit spot” nature connection practice. We each find our one place in the natural world that we will visit each day (under a tree, by the chickens, in the garden) and get to know it as our best friend.
Hike or Wander	Exploration of wild habitats can include wandering in The Meadow, trailblazing in The Beyond, art experiences, games, bug watching, animal roles, etc. Running, climbing, crawling and simple wandering are often part of the adventures.
Nature Play	Children freely engage in unstructured nature play; such as handcrafts, science project, theatrical fun, or help feed the birds, etc. We also encourage their nature journaling, reading, mapping, and investigations. This time also includes handwashing and snacking, depending on the children's needs
Closing Circle	Children share stories of the day, discuss new interests, share additional Gratitude's, often around a campfire, and sing our good-bye song.
Departure	Grown-ups will meet us at the Picnic Table for pick-up and sign out on the roster. Children go home with their dirty clothes, backpack, take-homes and nature journal. Outdoor gear can remain in their cubby hooks for the week. Please, ask your child to share their nature journal with you when you get home!

¹ See our COVID-19 POLICY.

EMERGENT CURRICULUM

Our curriculum is ever-changing and parallels the changing seasons. Sprout, blossom, go to seed, decay, and slumber – we discover the mysteries of the natural world. Children bring their ideas, interests, backgrounds, and skills to outdoor exploration and learning. As guides observe the children's play and inquiry, they identify ways to support the needs and growth of each child. In this way, guides and children are co-collaborators of meaningful emergent curriculum. The pace, mode, and topics of learning are born in nature and informed by children who lead the way. <https://www.naturalcommunity.org/daily-rhythm>.

Our curriculum is a compilation of several sources and experiences. We especially like *Exploring Nature with Children*, by Lynn Seddon and *Growing Up Wild*, by Project Wild. We also tap into the National Association of Environmental Education (NAEE), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools (ERAFANS), Tinkergarten, TreeBath, YouTube, and Pinterest. The sources for fun and emergent nature-based curriculum and activities are endless. Feel free to share your ideas and suggestions with our Staff!

Fun-filled Elements of our Learning:

- Fort-Building
- Loose Parts
- Make Believe
- Campfires
- Fairy Villages
- Dramatic Play



CELEBRATIONS

Life is one big celebration and it seems everything we encounter in the natural world is worthy of its own recognition. With that being said, Miss Maple's refrains from celebrating traditional/social holidays (Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, Easter, etc.) to allow time and place for the wondrous happenings around us each day. We rejoice in the blossoming of a new flower, the hatching of baby chicks, glorious sunsets, seasonal changes, moon phases, and especially our own birthdays. These natural blessings are part of our curriculum, including each child's day of birth that we'll mark in a small, but commemorative way. No gifts or cake please.

FIELD TRIPS

On occasion, we meet at other outdoor locations to explore and learn about. We will always send notice and permission slips home in advance of an outing. Parents may be asked to transport their child(ren) to these alternative sites and are always welcome to hang out with us for the excursion, too! (Example outings - Pie Tree Orchard, RADR Recreation Complex, Crystal Lake Park, Highview Farm)

DAYS & HOURS OF OPERATION

Hours of operation 8 am – 4 pm, Monday – Friday

The holidays and week listed below are **PAID**, and CLOSED, when applicable:

- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day/After
- Christmas Eve - New Year's Day

We are also closed for two weeks in the summer...TBD

*We *do not* close for snow days (snowstorm fun!) but, need at least 3 children to be open for day.

*See the *CALENDAR* page on our website for fun activity information

Because of COVID-19 – Our programs are limited to just 10 children of the same families for the entire 8-week session and are subject to change to coincide with demand and mandated restrictions.

PROGRAMS & TUITION

During these unprecedented times, our childcare operates and invoices in **8-week sessions**, allowing families and us the ability to stay current and flexible. Families not able to pay the entire 8-week session up front, we offer a convenient Payment Plan to stretch the payments over the first four weeks.

SESSION	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	RATE
Morning 8a – 12p	Little Sprouts ½ Day	TBD	Little Sprouts ½ Day	TBD	TBD	Little Sprouts (3&4 yrs) Forest Kindergarten (5&6 yrs)
Afternoon 12p – 4p	Little Sprouts Full Day	Forest Kindergarten ½ Day	Little Sprouts Full Day	Forest Kindergarten ½ Day	TBD	Two ½ Days/wk \$400 (\$50/wk)
Evening 5p – 7p	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	Two Full Days/wk \$640 (\$80/wk)

- Children attending Full Day sessions bring their own lunch.
- Evening sessions are reserved for special offerings (i.e. tutor, clubs, meetings) and fees will be determined accordingly.

*See the *CHILDCARE CONTRACT in the Enrollment Packet* for financial details.

MEALS

Miss Maple's Nature House participates in the USDA Child Care Food Program. We provide well-balanced snacks as well as 100% juices, and water made available throughout the day. At the recommendation of the State Office of Epidemiology, we cannot accept opened containers of food brought from home to be shared.

Parents are required to notify staff of any known food allergies your child may have and provide any specific foods for children with special dietary requirements.



Children are encouraged to try new foods, but never forced to eat anything they do not care for. Any uneaten food brought from home, will be returned that same day so that parents can see how much/what their child has eaten.

Currently, we don't provide breakfast, lunch, or specific foods for children with special dietary requirements. Please note ... We have a very gracious local food bank. Please let us know if your family needs assistance with breakfast, lunch or at-home meals.

GEAR UP

All children are required to come dressed for the weather and for messy play. We recommend clothes with elastic waistbands—no zippers, snaps, belts or suspenders as these greatly complicate bathroom time. The ideal way to keep a child comfortable during a cold day, as s/he romps through nature, is to dress them in layers. Layers should be loose-fitting to trap heat easily.

Your child will need to bring ...

- a small backpack and water canteen/bottle
- sturdy, closed-toed shoes for trail-blazing (Crocs are good)
- weather-appropriate gear for outdoor play. Jackets should be waterproof for rain days
- an extra change of clothes stored in a labeled Ziploc bag to keep in their cubby

Please leave small toys, candy, gum, coins, and other small items at home.

*Whether the weather is cold,
Or whether the weather is hot.
Whether the weather is nice,
Or whether the weather is not.
We'll weather the weather
Whatever the weather
Whether we like it or not.*

(rhythm to hand/knee slapping)

COMMUNICATIONS

We always strive to be open and transparent with our beliefs, policies, and actions. We ask that families do the same.

- The best way for us to communicate is by return phone call or email.
- Texting is appropriate for short and non-vital messaging, not for bank and forth conversations or important subject matters.
- We don't answer calls or texts after 8 am and we turn off the sound on our cellphones to focus 100% on the children.
- If you need to convey time-sensitive information, such as an imminent absence or late arrival, please send a text to the House phone with the details.
- Please do not verbally pass information about upcoming absences to Guides at the beginning or end of the day. Because our attention is focused on the children, we may forget. A text is better.

Monthly newsletters will be emailed to parents outlining current and future adventures and activities, nature-based resources, and any other important information.

Our Miss Maples.com website is the primary source for program and enrollment information, and our [Facebook page](#) is the interactive platform for our daily boasting, blogging, and resource sharing. Please feel welcome to check-in, post, and share regularly.

TOILETING

Although we can handle occasional accidents, all children must be mostly toilet-proficient in order to attend our program. Children must be able to know when they have to go to the bathroom and be able to communicate that. Many children choose to pee outdoors in a designated place. However, we also have an indoor toilet. We regularly prompt the children to check in with themselves about whether they have a need to go potty.

BEHAVIOR & GUIDANCE

We believe in using positive reinforcement, redirection and reassurance as our primary tools. We highlight the importance of not only respecting each other's spaces but, also the space of our living forest. (ex: we may ask a flower for permission to pick one of its blossoms).

We have a zero-tolerance policy for hitting, grabbing, pushing, name-calling, aggressive-ness or any other demeaning behavior. If any of these behaviors occur, we work with the child to redirect their behavior. In the event of hurtful or destructive behavior, we may use a brief "cool down" time to allow the child a chance to calm down, discuss with them the issue and resolution, and then welcome them to rejoin the group activities. Parents will be informed of reoccurring incidences and the progress being made. We want all children to feel safe and supported.

STAFF/GUIDES

Wendy Gallant



“Miss Wendy” is the Owner and Director of *Miss Maple's Nature House* and has worked with children in a variety of positions for over 30 years. She is a Master Gardener, has an AAS in Business, a BA in Tourism & Hospitality, and recently acquired her Certification in Nature-Based Education in Baltimore, Maryland. She has two grown children, a daughter-in-law, and three-year old grandson. In her spare time (lol), she enjoys motorcycling, travel, pickleball, kayaking, and raising her chickens.

Macy Manchester



“Miss Macy” is the Assistant Director and Activities Coordinator at *Miss Maple's* and has the boundless energy and creativity that keeps our days fun and exciting. She comes to us with over four years' experience as a DSP working with adults with intellectual and physical disabilities. She is CPR/First Aid and CRMA certified. She enjoys 4-wheeling, hiking, crafting, 'nesting' in her new home with her fiancé and son and beating most anyone in a game of cornhole!

In addition to Adult/Infant/Pediatric CPR/First Aid certification, all regular staff also have fingerprinting/background checks, and ongoing trainings.

GUEST GUIDES

- Volunteers
- Student Interns
- Knot-tier
- Fire Starter
- Survivalist
- Herbalist
- Tutor
- Painter
- Carpenter
- Gardener
- Writer
- Percussionist
- Pet Care/Trainer
- Snowshoe/Ski Guide
- Kayaker
- Knitter/Crocheter

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Miss Maples' is committed to connecting with talented members of our community who want to share their skills and knowledge with our young people. From knot-tying to fly-tying, cooking and tutoring – our space is available (after childcare hours) for concocting, building, and learning just about anything you can think of. We also have a strong internet connection that can be utilized by home schoolers, remote learners, and youth who need a clean and quiet space to work on a project or school work. Call us for details!



ILLNESS, ACCIDENT, AND SAFETY POLICIES

Illness: Children must be kept out of childcare in the event of contagious illness, or if displaying any of the following symptoms within the last 24 hours:



- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fever over 101
- Unidentified rash
- Discharge from the eyes or ears
- Fever-free for 24 hours without medication, before returning to care.

It is the parent's responsibility to notify us if such a condition occurs and the child will be absent. Contagion is a problem, not only for other children and families in our care, but for staff. If we are ill, we may have to close.

Medication: Our policy is to dispense only those medications deemed necessary by the child's physician for the minimal number of doses possible. Per Maine Family Child Care Provider Licensing Regulations: Parent must provide written permission to dispense any medication to the child indicating the name, dosage and time schedule for the medication. All medication must be in the original, labeled container.

Immunization: Parents agree to provide documentation of the child's immunization record within 2 weeks of enrollment in accordance with Maine State Licensing Rules. It is the responsibility of the parent to update the child's medical records regularly.

Serious Injury/Accident/Emergency Policies:

As required by the licensing rule, *any injury to a child while in our care will be reported to their guardian. A written copy of a completed Report will be kept in the child's file. Where necessary under law, the Report will be forwarded to the appropriate governing agency.* Children are active and no amount of child proofing and supervision can prevent all injuries.

All staff maintain Adult/Pediatric/Infant CPR & First Aid Certification.

Medical attention is a guardian decision. When a guardian cannot be reached, we will act on our stead when a decision on immediate medical attention is needed.

In the event of an accident, injury, or emergency involving a child or staff member, we will immediately:

- Provide appropriate First Aid/CPR
- Call the local emergency response team (911), if needed
- Notify the parent/guardian.



COVID-19 POLICY

Miss Maple's Nature House COVID-19 Policy is based on the Governor's latest update to childcare providers and is subject to change with little or no notice. Thank you for your co-operation during this time.

Because of COVID-19 – Our programs are limited to just 10 children of the same families for the entire 8-week session and are subject to change to coincide with demand and mandated restrictions.

Face coverings or masks must be worn by staff members and adults entering the childcare. Anytime a social distance of 6' cannot be maintained, including outdoors, face coverings must also be worn. This includes children 5 and over. Children age 2-4 are encouraged to wear face covering.

Curbside drop off: A staff member will meet the child at their vehicle for check-in. They will perform a visual assessment, ask the parent/child a few general health questions, and take the child's temperature with a non-contact thermometer and record the results. If the child has a temperature of 101 or more, or is presenting with any of the COVID-related symptoms, they will not be allowed to participate at Miss Maple's. Staff members will wash their hands before and after assessment and staff and parents will limit direct contact and maintain at least 6' social distance.

Children or staff who present COVID-like symptoms during the day will be isolated immediately, provided a face covering, and sent home with their caregiver as soon as possible.

On pick up: Ideally, the same person or designated person should drop-off or pick-up the child each session. Staff will record time out on roster for the parent.

Extra clothes, blankets, etc. should remain at Miss Maple's, and we will launder them on site.

- Miss Maple's will provide hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) in multiple locations around the property for adults and children to use freely and frequently.
- Hand washing will occur throughout the day, before/after specific activities and at least every 45 minutes.
- Surfaces and objects that are frequently touched will be routinely cleaned, sanitized, and disinfected.
- Sharing of toys will be limited to the same group children. Soft/cloth toys are not allowed.
- Paper-based materials are not considered a high risk for transmission and do not need additional cleaning.
- Children will be frequently reminded to keep their hands away from their face.

If COVID-19 is confirmed in a child or staff member, both parties must notify each other immediately and initiate the procedures as outlined in the [Guidance for Childcare Providers](#).



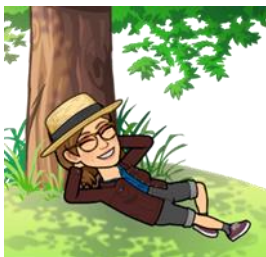
ENROLLMENT

Our classes are small and in high demand. To register for *Miss Maple's Nature House*, please complete the following steps:

1. Visit our website and [Facebook page](#) to help you get to know who we are and what our mission is. There you will find our Family Handbook, current Session Calendar, Tuition Rates, etc.
2. Schedule a call or attend a ZOOM meeting with the Director. Allow a minimum of 20 minutes to talk about the program.
3. After the meeting or phone conversation, you'll receive an email containing an Enrollment Packet w/Forms.
4. Participate in a trial session with your child. **Due to present COVID circumstances, trial classes are canceled until further notice.** Instead, you are welcome to schedule a private visit with us, after hours. Also, please feel free to call or email with questions or comments.
5. Submit the completed Enrollment Packet along with the session's full tuition or first convenience Payment, and \$10 Supply Fee to us via email, snail mail, or drop-off at the Nature House. All info documents and forms are available in hardcopy or digital format.
6. Gear up for some good old-fashioned fun in the great outdoors.

Probation Period – (Applicable to new families only) - Within the first two weeks of care, either the parent or provider may discontinue the contract with no notice.

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Through a review of the literature, it is evident that when children are connected with nature, they are healthier physically and emotionally. Studies show that being exposed to views of green grass or trees can improve memory, concentration and grades, and the symptoms of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). (Schmitz, 2012)

PROVIDER RESPONSIBILITIES

Miss Maple's Nature House ...

- Is an inclusionary program and we welcome all families, children and staff members without regard to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or ability. We respect the confidentiality of families using our services. Staff adheres to all regulations set by the State of Maine in the *Rules for the Licensing of a Family Child Care Facility*. A copy of the licensing regulations is available for parent review.
- Follows the guidelines for nutrition set by the USDA Child Care Food Program.
- Informs parents immediately of any emergency.
- Above all, provides a safe, nurturing environment for the children in our care. We treat each child and family with respect, and value input and participation of parents and families.

Miss Maple's Nature House staff ...

- Are mandated reporters and child advocates and will follow the written guidelines for handling and reporting suspected child abuse or neglect in accordance with Maine law as described in the pamphlet, "Child Abuse and Neglect Maine Department of Human Services." A copy of this pamphlet is available for parent review. Our responsibility is to ensure the safety of the children in our care and to advocate for those we believe may need help.
- Will observe the children in our care daily and report activities, progress, developmental achievements, health status, concerns, etc. to the parent as needed.
- Put the health and well-being of the children in our care, first. Should we suspect that any person picking up a child is operating their vehicle "under the influence", we will ask the person to call a back-up driver to transport the adult and child. If the person refuses and proceeds to leave the premises with the child, we will notify the local police department of the situation. We also expect children to be transported using an appropriate child safety seat.

RESOURCES

- [Maine Roads to Quality](#): Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) works to promote and support professionalism in the field of early childhood education and to improve quality through the provision of a statewide system of professional development. :
- [Maine Department of Family and Child Services](#): The Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) supports Maine's children and their families by providing Children's Development, Behavioral Health, & Child Welfare Services
- [Children & Nature Network](#): a hub of research, community networks, and training tools with the goal of increasing children's engagement with nature.
- [Natural Start Alliance](#): a project of the North American Association for Environmental Education, and a coalition of educators, parents, organizations, and others who want to help young children connect with nature and care for the environment.
- [Tinkergarten](#): a technology-enabled network of leaders that brings families together in a natural place in their community for classes where kids learn through play.
- [In Bloom Conferences](#): a series of one-day conferences offered by Antioch University New England featuring early childhood educators and workshops to help you engage in the nature programming of your choice.
- [Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools \(ERAFANS\)](#): Professional association that blazes a trail to meaningful nature connection through nature-based teacher training and education.