

## **Introducing our Forest Kindergarten**

The "Forest Kindergarten" is a concept that has gained international acclaim. First boasted from the rich forests of Germany decades ago, the idea of Forest Kindergartens where children spend much to all of their school mornings in the outdoor classroom, has won the attention of many early childhood programs throughout the world. Waldorf schools across the United States are also introducing forest kindergartens which weaves beautifully into a Waldorf Early Childhood methodology. Rachel Kennedy, a teacher at the Hartsbrook Waldorf School (in Hadley, Massachusetts) who is starting an all-outdoor kindergarten has found from her research that the benefits of the Forest Classroom for children include, "full-body movement which establishes essential foundations for learning, rich sensory experiences providing opportunities for full sensory integration and individual adjustment to sensory stimulus, improved cognitive activity, mental acuity, and concentration, a natural environment for teamwork and social learning, health benefits associated with fitness, fresh air and sunshine, joyful participation in learning and increased self-confidence." As William and Dyanne and have reflected upon their own classes, they find that Kennedy's research rings true.

While our kindergartens have always made ample use of the gorgeous and sacred hundred acres that surround our school, two years ago Dyanne and William made a conscious choice to explore the benefits of more defined and extensive use of the woods. Each class spends all or most of 2 mornings a week in forests and meadows, hiking and working and playing and picnicking to and in various informal outdoor classrooms with names like Grandmother Rock, Sunny Meadow, Fairy House Grove, Story Meadow, Fort Town, and Madrona Meadow. Because we devote these 2 mornings without the need to rush along to another activity, children relax into appreciation and allow the environment to inspire them to new ideas and new physical challenges. We have been impressed with how the children have developed and with our increasing ability to guide the children and provide rich and (relatively) comfortable experiences out in our weather.

To read more about Forest Kindergartens, you'll find an interview with Rachel Kennedy at [http://www.masslive.com/living/index.ssf/2014/04/forest\\_classroom.html](http://www.masslive.com/living/index.ssf/2014/04/forest_classroom.html)

If parents of the youngest children may wonder how a 3 or 4 year old will fare outside all morning, they might take heart from an excellent and funny and profound fifteen minute video from Scotland entitled "Into the Middle of Nowhere." It provides a glimpse into a play-based outdoor preschool of 3 and 4 year olds. Visit <http://aeon.co/film/games-bring-discoveries-for-the-children-playing-and-for-us-too/> to watch this video. Faculty and parents who have seen it have enjoyed it immensely.