



# The Dragonfly

Fall, Winter, Spring & Summer

Four Seasons of Change at Dodge Nature Preschool



2020 Edition



**DODGE**  
NATURE CENTER



# The Wonder of All Four Seasons



I joined the Dodge Nature Preschool team a year ago, returning to Minnesota after a 10-year hiatus out west in California. In the past year, I have been reminded of the wonder, beauty and new challenges that all four seasons can bring. All this change can be exciting and filled with awe and wonder, but it can also make me so frustrated that I just want stay in bed!

During this pandemic, being outside feels like the safest place to enjoy the community of others. This issue was written in early 2020 to celebrate the joys and challenges throughout the four seasons at Dodge Nature Center. It feels more relevant than ever as many people are spending more time outdoors and figuring out how to be comfortable throughout the seasons. One phrase we live by at Dodge is, "There is no bad weather, just bad clothing."

In the outdoors, children utilize their senses as they encounter new phenomena. The seasons provide a great catalyst for their sensory exploration and their ability to make meaning about the world around them. Fifteen years ago our founders created a resource manual, *Four Seasons at a Nature-Based*

*"Live each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each."*

— Henry David Thoreau

Preschool that would support preschool staff in understanding all of the opportunities for learning and inquiry that Dodge's natural setting has to offer. Our teachers use this guide, along with the interests of children, to inform our emergent curriculum and create the learning environment.



As seasons change, like me struggling to get out of bed in the dark of winter, children may have fears and hesitations when they encounter new obstacles like wearing thick mittens and itchy socks, walking through sticky mud, or slipping on an icy trail. These experiences are important for children's development as they give them authentic opportunities to develop skills and tools for dealing with what is challenging and frustrating. As teachers and parents, we can support children by

giving them time and space to learn these skills, acknowledging their feelings, coaching them through as they work towards mastery, and finding accommodations for children with differing needs.

In this issue of the Dragonfly we guide you through a year at Dodge Nature Preschool with a focus on the joys and challenges of seasonal changes. We highlight some of our favorite places at Dodge to visit during each season; mine so far has been Maple Hill during the fall color change. We also include a phenology guide to help you explore the changing seasons with your family at Dodge and around your community. We hope that you enjoy this seasonal journey and that it helps you and your family explore outside even more during these difficult times.

*Amy Warzybok*

**Amy Warzybok**  
Dodge Nature Preschool Director

## Family Phenology Calendar Following the Natural Cycles of the Seasons

by Britney Stark, Oak assistant teacher

Phenology is the observing and/or recording of nature's events throughout the calendar year—events that occur on an annual cycle. As you explore outdoors, take a moment to note the changes around you. This is a great opportunity to slow down and make deeper connections to our natural world with your little explorers. The phenology calendar found on the back cover includes a few things we look for on a hike at preschool. Remember that nature's cycles are fluid and may happen earlier or later than expected.

When you are out exploring your yard, neighborhood, local park or nature center; take your time. You do not have to go far. Have a field guide handy. Bring a small journal and writing utensil to record what you find or draw a small picture. Ask questions. When your child asks you a question, ask what they think before you answer. Offer tidbits to help them further investigate what you have found, helping them to discover answers on their own.

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*The Dragonfly is produced  
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# Change and Predictability on the Farm Pond

## Its Many Faces Throughout the Year

by Joey Schoen, Assistant Director & Spruce Teacher

*"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter."*

- Rachel Carson

To a young child, the world can be filled with change and uncertainty. "Will my mom be back?" "When will I get a turn on the swing?" "Why can't I keep wearing my favorite pair of sandals?" As caregivers, we seek to provide a feeling of security that allows children to navigate the inevitable changes and uncertainties of life.

As children get to know the cycles of nature, they learn that change and constancy can exist side by side. One of the benefits of spending time in nature is that children have repeated experiences in familiar—but changing—settings. Like Dodge's "Farm Pond."

The Farm Pond (often just called "the pond") is an early destination for hikes as children begin their school year in the fall. Classes often walk along the boardwalk to get to the bee apiary—a very courageous adventure in the second week of school. On later hikes, children will gather sticks in the woods to use for

"fishing" at the pond. Sitting on the boardwalk, children stir and swirl the water creating patterns in the duckweed. As the children sit, relaxed by the stirring motion and burbling sounds of the water, they may see geese flying overhead or painted turtles nearby sunning on a rock. As the days turn colder, the appearance of the pond changes as the duckweed settles to the bottom. We see fewer and fewer animals as we sit and stir. Eventually, children have to wear mittens and fishing expeditions become more challenging in the icy cold water.

As winter arrives, sticks become tools to test the strength of ice forming at the edges of the pond. When conditions are right, children can scoop out thin sheets of ice and hold them up to sparkle in the sun. Usually by January the ice is strong enough to safely walk on. Children step off the boardwalk and into a new landscape for play. The wide-open space of the pond feels spectacular after being cooped up indoors.

One of the first signs of spring at Dodge is the cacophony of geese returning to the pond. As the ice weakens and recedes, children return to the safety of boardwalk where they watch the geese come in for landings like seaplanes, squawk at and chase one another as they vie for the best nesting spot. It's quite a show. The surrounding



cattails become noisy with the sound of red-winged blackbirds uncertain about these groups of children sitting so close to their nests. Children gather sticks again and go fishing, immersed in the explosion of sights and sounds that is spring. As the season winds to a close, we watch goslings swimming with their families—a sure sign that another school year is coming to an end.

When children visit the Farm Pond in the summer, it is hard to recognize. The familiar boardwalk becomes overgrown with cattails. The surface of the water is thick with duckweed. Children wonder if it is green ice. ("Can we walk on it?") The sounds of buzzing insects make it hard to hear one another as children sit and fish. Children hear frogs croaking and catch glimpses of them hiding in the duckweed. A few children (and teachers) are even nimble enough to catch a frog to take a closer look.

The Farm Pond endures throughout its many changes. Depending on the rains, the shape of the shoreline may change, but we always find the pond in the same place. The turtles and geese disappear for the winter, but we are assured by their predictable return in the spring. The idea that predictability can co-exist with change seeps in as the children visit this spot, and many other favorites, over the seasons. It's one of nature's greatest lessons.





# Fall—The Season of Change

Fall—the season of change, beauty, preparation, harvest and color. The energy around fall is unique and vibrant celebrating the new and mourning the old. This seasonal change is also a metaphor for the ways in which our lives all change with the coming of fall. For many families, fall means sending your child to school, sometimes for the very first time. It means learning to let go a little bit at a time and watching your baby grow up. It signifies a change in your family dynamic and learning your little one in a new way—as a preschooler. For teachers it means the excitement heading into a new school year, getting to know families and children and helping to mold all of these people into a thriving, caring community. It's carefully and joyfully setting up an engaging and inspiring school environment so children can learn and grow. It's also a time of learning and reflection, growing our professional knowledge and creating a strong teaching team. Change is welcome. We meet, and a new adventure begins!

## JOYS

- Growing a community
- Getting to know families
- Forming family/teacher bonds
- New and emerging friendships
- Leaf piles
- Harvesting
- Weather—warm, hot, chilly, rain, snow, windy, foggy
- Gaining trust in each other

## The best places in fall

by Kari Nusbaum, Spruce Teacher

### The Playground:

The playground is filled with the world's best toys: sticks, water, dirt, and mud! Our school playground allows children the freedom of open space along with the comfort of traditional and familiar playground equipment. It is where we spend most of our first days at school, getting to know children's needs and personalities. The children can swing, slide, climb, create art, engage in dramatic play, get wet and muddy, and relax. The large sandbox comes alive with dinosaurs and trucks and many children exploring with sand and water, making rivers and lakes in collaborative teams. The preschool garden is a sensory experience for many who choose to pick and harvest. Children taste herbs, greens, tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, raspberries, and more. Children learn to take care of wildlife by filling birdfeeders and finding worms for our chickens. Our playground is a sanctuary of ideas coming alive, all within the safety of our school grounds.

### The Community Garden:

From the Community Garden just beyond the farm, you can see familiar places (the school, farm, and nature center buildings). Here, the children are safe within the garden gate but freedom abounds! We first experience the fall harvest, as we freely and joyfully pick apples from the trees and pick raspberries from the bushes until our fingers and mouths are stained red with delicious juice. Sharing a harvest and feasting builds community. In the garden we feel nourished and cared for by nature and each other. We expand this feeling by collecting fallen apples from the ground and carrying them to the farm for the animals to enjoy, encouraging the growing sense of community. It is another way to practice empathy and caring for others.

## CHALLENGES

- Goodbyes/separation
- Learning transitions
- New routines and expectations
- Getting to know one another
- Supporting autonomy and independence
- The "first hikes" leaving the safety of the playground
- Gaining trust in each other

### Maple Hill:

Our first big hikes in the fall are met with a lot of anticipation and planning. One of the first places we hike to is Maple Hill. Maple Hill feels truly wild. We pass through familiar places along the way and then cross a small footbridge and enter a forest ablaze with color. In the fall, the trees are a brilliant yellow and seem as if they are shooting out from the sun itself. Leaves crunch beneath our feet and we come to a tiny path that leads us to the top of the world. On Maple Hill there is the most beautiful tree that greets us as we reach the top. Its glow sets the stage for play and adventure as children explore the space together. There can be evidence of animals to investigate, birds flying overhead, and a little way down the other side of the hill is a small pond to explore. There is a fire ring, which makes this space a great spot for a first class fire. The surrounding forest is dense and exciting and the wild nature of this place feels authentic. Maple Hill is a magical place that encourages children to find themselves in nature. Nature truly is the best playground. As Thoreau said, "All good things are wild and free."



# Winter—When Hidden Places Come Alive

Winter weather is an important part of the children's outside experience during a school year at Dodge Nature Preschool. While winter offers challenges, it also offers rich and joyful experiences! Warm winter gear, adjustments for individual children's cold tolerance, and engaging outdoor experiences all combine to make winter a fun time for children and teachers alike!

## Winter's Gifts

by Julie Nelson, former DNP teacher

### Frozen Wetlands & Open Water

Frozen Wetlands provide new opportunities for learning, exploration and play. Spaces that children could only observe from a distance in the summer and fall become possible because of winter: hiking up the creek, stomping through the marsh, climbing over an island, and slipping across the pond are experiences that are not options any other time of year. Picking a cattail, playing hide and seek in the marsh grass, climbing up trees arching over the frozen creek, and kick-sledding on the farm pond are winter-only experiences. Children learn how thick ice needs to be before we walk on it, and how to measure ice with an auger.

Open water beneath the willow tree offers a chance to learn what is over the ice and what is under the ice. A sump pump from the farm education building empties into the pond, delighting children as fresh water rushes in. A fish trap within the open water provides food for Dodge's lab turtles over the winter. Children discover fish and tadpoles in the open water. We wonder about the frogs that delighted us in the summer and early fall and learn that under the snow, under the ice, under the water, the frogs are hibernating in the mud and will return in spring. Open water allows us to experience first-hand the circles of life and wonders of nature.

### Challenge Hills

Our challenge hills are an all-around favorite hiking destination any time of the year. The ice and snow of winter provide new opportunities, adventures, challenges and thrills as children tackle these now slippery slopes. Through the winter months, children demonstrate resiliency and grit as they dig their boots into the steep and icy mountains and inch their way to the top. The empowering pride and joy that children feel as they reach the top of challenge hill is then quickly matched by the excitement and thrill of sliding down a fast ice slide!



### JOYS

- Sledding in the prairie
- Sledding down the farm hill
- Challenge Hill
- Kick sledding on the farm pond
- Hiking up the creek
- Breaking ice
- Icicles
- Snow mountains
- Fires
- Animal tracks
- Petting horses in the barn

### All About Animals

Children learn about animals in new ways during winter. The snow offers clues about which animals hike down the trails and through the wetlands when the children are not there. Animal tracks are visible in freshly fallen snow. Children may see bunny and coyote tracks alongside one another in the creek. Suddenly there is confusion in the tracks, as they are on top of one another, and the snow crushed. The bunny tracks go into the underbrush, and the coyote tracks continue down the creek. "The

### CHALLENGES

- Lost mittens
- Dropped hats
- Thick mittens that can't hold anything!
- Cold toes
- Cold fingers
- Icy trails
- Late children due to slow roads
- Below zero weather
- Late parents due to bad roads

bunny got away!" scream the delighted children. Scat is another clue teaching children about the animals that share the nature center. "Bunnies have been here!" "Look, it's the coyote!"

Dodge's horses delight the children year-round, but we have to watch from a distance during warm weather. Throughout the cold winter, the horses are in the barn with us. Children are delighted to see the horses up close and to pet them. The horses seem delighted to see the children, nuzzling them, and sometimes snatching a hat, much to the children's delight and the farmer's frustration!



# Spring — Flowers, Farm Babies, Mud

Spring is the season when the world comes alive with color again. The world turns from white and gray to brown with mud before turning green, yellow, purple and pink. Children delight in the fact that their hands have returned. In the winter our hands are lost beneath thick, warm mittens. We missed touching and exploring with our bare hands! As the fresh, white snow gets dirty, slippery and mucky, we learn anew the joy of jumping in puddles . . . until our socks are soaked with freezing water. Spring brings new life and new sights. Spring reminds us what was there before as everything returns from under our winter blanket of snow.

## Spring's blooms & babies

by Melissa Tobias, Oak Room Teacher

### Mrs. Dodge's Orchard

The wagon is loaded: books, blankets, journals, markers, snack, water, cups, wipes, plastic bag for trash. We welcome the children with the news that today we will head out on an apple orchard adventure. Will there be apples? What will we see? How will we get there? Along the way we hear the sounds of red wing black birds, geese, and other birds that have recently returned to Dodge. We smell that sweet smell of fresh grass growing, and feel the sun warming the earth all around us. The children venture through mungle jungle, past the barn, across the boardwalk, down along the bee creek, and continue the long journey up the farm road all the way to Mrs. Dodge's property. We know we are getting close when we pass the giant cottonwood tree at the top of the hill. How many children does it take to wrap their arms around the circumference of the tree!? At the top of the hill we see it, the field of pink and white is in view. The children race down the driveway and into the wonderland of pink petals. We spread out the blanket, lay out books, and watch the children race up and down

the rows of apple trees decorated with new blossoms. After games of tag, rolling down the hill, making dandelion crowns, and soaking in the sunshine, everyone gathers on the blanket to have snack. As the wind blows petals of pink and white rain down on us and it feels like pure magic.

If the hike to Mrs. Dodge's Orchard is a little too ambitious, groves of flowering trees can be found in the community garden, next to the apiary, and along the trails around the prairie pond. To see the delicate shades of pink, white, and purple is like candy for the eyes. The aroma of the blossoms is sweet and fresh. The petals make great loose parts for play or a lovely addition to a collage. We are so grateful for the magical spaces at Dodge where we believe we could most certainly be among the fairies.

### Spring Babies:

"Baaaa!! Maaaa! Cheep cheep! Oink oink oink! Peep peep!" In mid to late March, children hear an orchestra of animal sounds from the playground. The farm babies are here! Each time we

### CHALLENGES

- Wet, soggy gear
- Watch out for the geese!
- Ice
- Mud
- The smell
- Allergies
- Ticks
- Sunscreen and bug spray
- Scratchy plants

hike past the farm, we check in with the farmer to hear the news about what babies have arrived. We eagerly enter the barn to get a peek at the tiny piglets snuggled up in a heap, the fuzzy lambs, and wobbly kids (baby goats). In the chicken coop, we find dozens of fluffy little chicks of all colors. "Can we hold them?!" the children ask with excitement. For weeks, it seems like a new farm baby joins the Dodge family every other day. The children are inspired to name them, draw them, and write stories about them. What is your favorite baby farm animal?

### JOYS

- Green
- Mud
- Dandelions
- Colors
- Farm babies
- Birds are back
- Maple syrup
- Flowers
- The smells
- New buds and sprouts
- Warmer days
- Outside water play



# Summer — Exploring with All 5 Senses

Summer at Dodge Nature Preschool often feels like the shortest of all four seasons. Children join us for only six short weeks when we pack in all that summer in Minnesota has to offer. We sweat through the hot, humid days, stomp through puddles left behind, and sometimes shelter inside to keep safe from loud, bright thunderstorms. Summer brings new friends and new sensory experiences.

## JOYS

- Foraging berries
- Eating from the garden
- Flooding the sandbox
- Reading in the shade
- Popsicles
- Butterflies
- Bare feet
- Prairie flowers
- Shorts, tank tops and sundresses

## 'Flying Flowers' in the Garden

by Judy Moran, Willow Room Teacher

Summer time, and the living is easy! Unencumbered by bulky coats, mittens and hats, children happily run outside to explore their world. At Dodge Nature Preschool, children care for wildflowers and observe the garden's rapid growth there during our 6 weeks together. Caring for native coneflowers, Monarchs, and milkweed brings us closer to a winged wonder of the natural world—butterflies.

Many children delight in watching these "flying flowers" flit from bloom to bloom. Teachers extend the butterfly connection by guiding our young naturalists to look closely underneath milkweed plant leaves – what do you see? Oftentimes it takes a small magnifying glass (or young eyes) to see small green eggs or little monarch caterpillars busily munching on the milkweed leaves.

Sometimes when we find monarch caterpillars or eggs on a hike, we collect the leaves they live on and bring them back to preschool to observe nature's amazing metamorphosis more closely. Children watch the caterpillars devour the milkweed leaves and quickly grow.



After about two weeks, when they're fully grown, the caterpillar hangs upside down in a J-shape, and 24 hours later becomes a chrysalis. With anticipation many children check on the chrysalis every day. But it takes another week or two until they emerge as a monarch butterfly. Once the butterfly's wings are dry, children excitedly gather around the butterfly enclosure, open the door and watch the new monarchs explore their world. "We love you butterfly!"

## The Preschool Sandbox

by Jane Stier, former DNP teacher

During the summer, Sandbox Village is a very popular place. As any real estate agent will tell you, it all has to do with LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION! Sandbox Village (or The Sandbox) is a roomy community located within The Playground, conveniently situated near The Bathrooms. It is roughly divided into two sections: wet side and dry side.

## CHALLENGES

- Hot, sticky weather
- Mosquitoes & wasps
- Stinky bug spray
- Thunderstorms sending us indoors
- Sunburn
- Sunscreen in eyes
- Cuts and scrapes on bare skin
- Overgrown trails

The wet side is where many engineering tasks occur. Villagers make good use of the water from the rain barrels to construct roads, bridges, rivers, lakes and tunnels. As with any construction project, the engineers, contractors and vehicle operators must communicate and plan. Each of them has his/her own idea about where the bridge should cross the river, who gets to flood the river and which vehicle gets to dig it out. To complicate matters further, there is a finite amount of water in each rain barrel. Cooperation is essential to make the best use of it.

The dry side of The Sandbox is where many of the small businesses and community events are located. The Lemonade Stand is a full-service bakery, smoothie stand, ice cream shop and restaurant. The cooks often take turns using the equipment and staffing the counter. The seating areas usually double as the kitchen, so you must be careful not to accidentally sit on a pie! Villagers love to bring their dinosaurs or giant insects to the eatery. Next to the food area, there are a number of holes being dug, castles being built or treasures being buried. Limited space gives the villagers opportunities to collaborate, working together to keep our favorite spot a fun one for everyone.



# Family Phenology Calendar *(continued)*

## Fall/Autumn

**(Meteorological Sept. 1 & Equinox Sept. 22)**

- Summer & fall garden harvest
- Visit an apple orchard
- Goldenrod in full bloom
- First sign of fall colors
- Leaves begin to fall
- After a fall rain go for a mushroom hunt
- First frost
- Arrival of Dark-eyed Juncos
- Migrating birds heading back south, flying 'V'
- The Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis)
- Days growing shorter
- Ice may begin to form on lakes
- Milkweed pods splitting open
- Hibernation begins in late fall
- Muskrat house-building begins

## Winter

**(Meteorological Dec 1 & Solstice Dec 21)**

- First snow
- Nearest pond/lake completely iced over
- First temp below zero
- Lowest temp of the winter
- Animal tracks & signs: who's out in winter? who hibernates? who migrates?
- Set up bird feeders and track species & frequency of visits, listen for their calls
- Track sun rise and sun set
- Red oaks begin to lose their remaining leaves in February in preparation for spring
- Get out in the snow & ice, shovel, build snow people & quinzhees
- Poke the snow, how does it change day-to-day?
- Break ice

## Spring

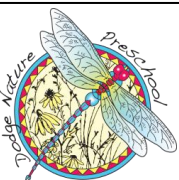
**(Meteorological Mar. 1 & Equinox Mar. 19)**

- First temps above freezing (32° F)
- Red-winged Blackbirds and Wood ducks
- Ice-out
- Thunderstorm
- Chipmunks
- First goslings
- Egret, Bluebird, Hummingbird, Oriole
- First flowers & leaves
- Maple tree seeds
- Chorus frogs
- Turtles sunbathing
- Dragonflies & mosquitoes
- Dandelions blooming
- Apple blossoms & lilacs
- Puddles & mud

## Summer

**(Meteorological June 1 & Solstice June 20)**

- Butterfly & dragonfly metamorphosis
- Trills of the common tree frog
- Turtles crossing the road to lay eggs
- Ripe garden strawberries
- Songbird nestlings and/or fledglings
- Cottonwood "cotton/seeds" dropping
- Ripe mulberry trees
- Ducklings
- Tadpoles & pollywogs
- Emerging insects, cicadas, grasshoppers, etc.
- Look for wild edibles
- Fireflies
- Harvest peas, chard, broccoli, cauliflower, beets, tomatoes & carrots.
- Migrating monarchs (late August)
- Shooting stars (late August)



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