



N O U R I S H Y O U R N E E D F O R

# NATURE™

SPRING/SUMMER 2026



DODGE IS  
NOT JUST  
FOR THE  
KIDS

D O D G E N A T U R E C E N T E R A N D P R E S C H O O L



# A Conference Rooted in CARE

On an April morning at Dodge, a group is gathered and ready to learn. They're dressed for the outdoors in hiking boots and hats. Pen and paper are poised, ready for notetaking. Hands raise, followed by questions about sticks, insects, and turtles.

These learners aren't children, but adult educators. They're here for Dodge Nature Preschool's annual Learning Conference.

The day-long conference brings more than 50 people from across Minnesota to Dodge, all eager to incorporate nature into their early education settings at childcare centers, elementary schools, nature centers, and homeschools.

"Our preschool has its capacity—we can't serve every child here," says Preschool Director Amy Warzybok. "This conference helps inspire more places to do outdoor learning. **The more places, the better for children.**"

The first conference was held in 2010 with just 20 attendees, ten years after the preschool opened as the first of its kind in Minnesota. Now in its 15th year (2020 put the conference on pause), the conference has drawn people from as far as Arizona and Canada.

"People know Dodge is the place to learn how to do nature preschool," Amy says.

The day focuses on immersive activities that teachers and preschoolers experience throughout the year.

Guided hikes, activity stations with hands-on materials, and breakout sessions (with topics like puppets and playful gardening) give participants real-life ideas they can bring into their practice.

Amy says the conference isn't just about learning—it's about **caring for educators, too**. "This field can have a lot of burnout. This day is for them to feel cared for, mentally and physically."

Included in the conference is a light breakfast, catered lunch, and hydration bar. Small details like tablecloths, centerpieces with natural cuttings from the nature center, and real plates (instead of single use) all create a cozy and relaxing vibe for participants.

Built-in outdoor time helps participants naturally destress and connect to nature and one another.

"I can feel my blood pressure going down just being outside," one participant remarked during a guided hike of Dodge.

"One thing I don't think people realize is **early childhood nature education is so good for adults, too**," Amy shares. "I hope they leave feeling nourished and refreshed."

With lots of positive feedback every year, Amy and her expert team of teachers are making a real impact on educators.

One participant remarked: "**This day helped me find my focus and passion again.**"

**Left:** Conference attendees head into the preschool building for classroom tours, interactive stations, and breakout sessions. **Middle:** Attendees paint with bird feathers and natural dyes. **Right:** An attendee holds Zelda, the classroom chicken, during the Animal Encounters session.





## Come for pancakes, stay for community

It started with a simple question: can you pass the maple syrup?

Three years ago, Nadine & Randy Thomas (pictured left above) and Kathy & Steve Oakley (pictured right above) found themselves sharing a table at Dodge's annual Pancake Breakfast.

Over flapjacks and coffee, a new friendship began.

Kathy and Steve had lived in Saint Paul for 30 years before moving to Mendota Heights, where they were searching for things to do in their new neighborhood. Over in Woodbury, Nadine and Randy stumbled across the event on Facebook.

"You have to be much more intentional about being social as you get older," Kathy says. "It was so rewarding to meet Nadine and Randy at a place like Dodge Nature Center."

That chance encounter grew into a treasured friendship. The couples bonded over shared interests, visited each other's homes, and found a new favorite place together: Dodge.

"It's so great for stress relief," Kathy shares. "To see ducks swimming on the pond, feel the breeze on your face, and know that natural things are happening—it is so necessary."

Having moved to the Twin Cities from South Dakota, the Thomases thought they'd be leaving wild, natural spaces behind. Discovering Dodge changed that—and gave them a place to keep learning alongside new friends.

"It's amazing that Dodge is here to conserve nature and be a place for children to learn about the natural world," Nadine says. "And older children, too!" Randy adds.

Find adult-only programs in blue in the *Nature Activities* section.



# Nature Activities

MAY - AUGUST 2026

For activity details and registration, visit [DodgeNatureCenter.org/Activities](https://DodgeNatureCenter.org/Activities)

### MAY

14	Forest Bathing	Adults 16+
<b>Live Music, Farm Fun!</b> <b>Rock the Barn</b> <b>5.16.26</b>		
Farm Babies • Live Bands Pony Rides • Wagon Rides Food and Drink • Games <i>and much more!</i>		
		<b>All Ages - \$8</b> Kids under 2 - free!
20	Preschool Information Session	Families
20	Wild Cocktails*	Adults 21+
21, 28	Blacksmithing Basics (Series)*	Adults 18+
28	Wild Cocktails	Adults 21+

### JUNE

3	Fire Building Basics*	Adults 16+
4, 11, 18, 25	Blacksmithing Basics (Series)*	Adults 18+
4	Discover Dodge Open House	All Ages
5, 12, 19, 26	Elemental Yoga	Adults 18+
6	Trunk to Treetop*	Grades 1-3
9	Fire Building Basics	Adults 16+
11	Forest Bathing	Adults 16+
30	Dodge After Dark: Fireflies*	Families

### JULY

1	Forest Bathing	Adults 16+
2, 9	Blacksmithing Basics (Series)*	Adults 18+
10	Elemental Yoga	Adults 18+
11	Weather Science*	Grades 3-5
23	Nature Mandalas	Adults 16+
31	Universe in the Park*	All Ages

### AUGUST

6	Forest Bathing	Adults 16+
7	Universe in the Park	All Ages
19	Bees to Mead*	Adults 21+
22	Taste and Learn: Harvest Time*	Adults 16+

\*Located at Shepard Farm in Cottage Grove

# ON THE MENU: FRESH LEARNING FROM NATURE

Spending time in nature is a very sensory experience—listening, feeling, and seeing the outdoors around you. At Dodge, we invite you to take a step further with **tasting**.

Food has long been incorporated into education at Dodge. One of the first programs established was a teaching garden. Students tilled dirt, planted seeds, cultivated seedlings, and harvested fruits and vegetables at summer's end. Maple syruping, campfire cooking, and wild edibles followed, and are now staples of youth programming.

In recent years, **food has helped create a space just for adults at Dodge**. Naturalist Michael Harrison recognizes the need for these adult-only programs.

"Adults don't have a lot of spaces where they're allowed to not know everything," Michael explains. "When they come to Dodge, they're given the guidance in a judgement-free zone to learn something new."

Programs like Wild Cocktails, Foraged Foods, Apple Pie Date Night, and the Taste and Learn series (featuring topics like bread and herbs) have stirred interest and appetites.

"Our tagline is **Nourish Your Need for Nature—we take that literally!**" says naturalist Teresa Root, creator of the Taste and Learn series. "Using food in our programs attracts, educates, and inspires our visitors."

When developing food-based programs, naturalists create an experience that is rooted in **natural history, locally available ingredients, and hands-on activities**. Adult audiences also give naturalists the opportunity to go deeper into a topic. Take maple syruping as an example.

"With adults, I'll talk about forestry management and why sugar maple trees stand in big pockets," naturalist Andy Vang explains. "Indigenous peoples cared for forests with such intentionality—it's where their food came from."

Hands-on is what we do at Dodge. Naturalists have adults collecting eggs from real chickens, foraging mushrooms in the woods, and picking apples right off the tree.

Learning by doing is not only fun for participants but helps knowledge stick—and makes the connection from **curiosity to care**. Michael sees this with foraging and wild edible programs.

"A lot of people view weeds—dandelions, stinging nettle, and garlic mustard—as useless plants," Michael says. "But these are edible plants. Reframing how people approach them gives them a reason to care about what is going on outside."

Dandelions are delicious when dunked in pancake batter and fried (a crowd favorite at Rock the Barn). Stinging nettle leaves become a crispy snack when tossed with oil & spices and baked. And garlic mustard makes an aromatic pesto that rivals the original.

Andy is especially fond of fungi: morel, oyster, hen-of-the-woods, and more. He recently taught two Mushrooming 101 programs that brought 30 adults to Dodge. He's only with participants for two hours, but he hopes they leave with the skills and motivation to forage on their own.

"I want to encourage people to go out into nature and recognize these plants around them," Andy says. "There's this whole outdoor kitchen at their fingertips—we're just opening the door for them."



Above: Andy crouches to get a closer look at a patch of morel mushrooms.

Below: Two participants in Mushrooming 101 inspect a mushroom up close.



Scan the QR code for delicious wild edible recipes you can make on your own.

Appetite for food programming? Join us at Rock the Barn on May 16 to try dandelion fritters! Find more upcoming activities at [DodgeNatureCenter.org/Activities](https://DodgeNatureCenter.org/Activities).



**BIG**  
or small



help care for  
them all!



Sponsor your  
favorite  
farm animal