

THE NATURE PLACE DAY CAMP

Summer 2023 Cookbook

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This Place is The Nature Place

It was camp time once again. The curtains drew open. The big stage - acres of fields and woods, the farm, the campus with the Fairy Stream and Enchanted Forest, Nature's Playground, the outdoor classroom, the garden with a chicken coop, the swimming pond - was set for the new season of The Nature Place Day Camp.

At The Nature Place, we celebrate nature, magic, adventure, and friendship. We build connections to the natural world and to each other. We play, explore, create art, swim in the pond, walk, climb, camp, hike, backpack, and canoe in Harriman State Park. We sing and we dance to the beat of the drum. We create skits in the Enchanted Forest and we look for trolls everywhere. We visit the cows and horses on the farm. We grow a garden, feed chickens, pet bunnies, practice archery, learn to build a fire and set up a tent. We cook, in and outdoors, and we cross the Fairy Bridge several times a day. We explore the nature pond and its creatures, we play in the stream, we still-hunt, we watch the clouds, and celebrate the sun and the rain. Most importantly, we connect, form friendships, and create a community called The Nature Place Day Camp.

Those who have experienced it know. Quotes from our collection of insightful, magical, and fun comments made by campers tell it all. We call them quotable quotes, and they speak for themselves.



In the garden, while eating a freshly picked cucumber:

“I didn’t know I liked cucumbers.”

From a young camper on a rainy day: *“Rain is amazing!”*

Out in nature: *“There are fairies here, but you can’t see them because you are an adult. Only campers can because we’re small and cute.”*

From the very top of the high ropes, facing other campers:

“I come to you in peace ... and I hope not to come down in pieces.”

On the bus: *“So many big things happened today. We found a troll right away. That was actually the first big thing that happened.”*

From an Almost Overnight:

“I hugged the grass when I got out there because I missed it so much!”

Quotable Quotes
2023
Quotable Quotes

Favorite moment at the camp:
“When I met my new friend.”

From a dinosaur expert:
“Dinosaurs can get arthritis.”

From Cedar Pond: *“I am so happy today. Why? We get to have a campfire tonight.”*

During nature activity at the stream:

“My shoes are completely soaked... I like it!”

From an older camper on a rainy day:

“Every time it rains, it’s like a birthday party for the plants.”

On an Almost Overnight: *“I guess what they say is true. If you believe you can do something, you can.”*

.... and one that summarizes it all:

“This is as Nature Place as it gets, I’m climbing, I’m chewing on a maple leaf, and I have dirt on my face!”

Taking Care Week

During the first week of camp, we build connections and trust, establish our values, and sow seeds for a wonderful summer. In the kitchen, taking care translated into making comfort food: fresh bread. First, we found satisfaction and comfort in touching the soft dough, and a few hours later in taking the first bite of freshly made bread formed by our own hands. Besides the culture of the camp, we started to build another, tangible type of culture: a sourdough one. Rye berries were ground into flour using our manual grain mill then mixed with water. We had a plan: to nourish and take care of the sourdough culture in the coming weeks and use it for a special baking project during the fifth week of camp.

Dough

2 cups whole-wheat flour
 4 cups unbleached
 all-purpose flour
 3 cups lukewarm water
 1/2 cup raisins
 1/4 cup sunflowers seeds,
 pecans, or walnuts
 2 teaspoons instant dry
 yeast
 2 tablespoons salt

Bread Sticks

Combine the dry ingredients (except for the raisins and seeds/nuts) in a mixing bowl. Add water. Stir together with a large spoon or mix on low speed with the paddle attachment until the dough comes together. Adjust with water or flour if your dough seems too sticky or too dry.

Cover and let rest for about 20 minutes. Knead by hand or machine (on medium speed for 10 minutes). Add the raisins and seeds/nuts, if using, and knead for 1 more minute. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the dough ferment at room temperature for approximately 1 1/2 - 2 hours, or until doubled in size. Push the dough down and let proof again until doubled in size.

Dust your counter or a large wooden board with flour. Transfer the dough onto the floured surface, and divide it into 16 pieces and form round rolls. Cover with a kitchen towel and let rest for 10 minutes. Applying gentle pressure with the palms of your hands, roll the balls into sticks. Put the sticks on a baking sheet, cover and let rest for 30 minutes. Bake the sticks in a preheated oven at 420 °F for about 25 minutes. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and transfer the rolls to a cooling rack. Hot bread is extremely tempting, but please wait at least 20 minutes before taking the first bite.



Where? Week

We continued our quest for homemade food made from scratch. The kitchen was a very popular place this week. We were making pasta! The campers collected the eggs for the recipe from the chicken coop in the garden. We learned that traditionally, making pasta was one of the ways to preserving eggs. Pasta was made during the spring and summer months when eggs were abundant, then dried and saved for the cold season. Of course, we savored the fresh pasta right away. And it was good! The week's quotable quote from the kitchen went like this:

"I can't believe it! This is the best pasta I have ever had.... And I made it myself!"

2 cups all-purpose flour
3 eggs
1/2 teaspoon salt +
more for the cooking
water
1/2 teaspoon olive oil
butter/olive oil and
fresh herbs for serving

Pasta

This recipe calls for a pasta machine. Of course, traditionally pasta was rolled out with a rolling pin and cut by hand. Rolling out the pasta dough thin enough might be a challenging task for most of us, but it is certainly worth trying.

Sift the flour onto a clean work surface and make a well in the center. Break the eggs into the middle of the well. Add the salt and oil. Gradually mix the eggs with flour using your fingers, bringing the ingredients together into a firm ball. Add a little water, if the dough feels too dry. Knead the dough for 3-5 minutes. Cover and let rest at room temperature for about an hour.

Using a rolling pin, roll out the pasta to 1/4 inch or thinner. At this point the rolling becomes challenging, and a pasta machine becomes handy. Pass strips of dough through the pasta machine. Start with the widest setting. Repeatedly pass the sheets of pasta through the machine, gradually adjusting to thinner settings, one pass at a time, until the pasta achieves the desired thickness. Place the pasta on a clean tablecloth or hang over the back of the chair and let it dry a little. If the sheets are too long, cut them into manageable size before shaping. Shape the pasta by passing it through the chosen cutter or cut it by hand.

Spread the pasta out again on the tablecloth and let it dry a little. In the meantime, put a large pot of salty water to boil. Throw the pasta into the water. Stir the pasta immediately and perhaps once again. If you've used enough water and you stir the pasta as it goes in, it shouldn't stick. Quickly bring the pasta back to a rolling boil, stir, and boil until al dente, or firm to the bite, about 2 minutes. The exact cooking time will depend on the thickness of your pasta.

Drain, put the pasta back into the pot and immediately add your favorite sauce or enjoy simply with some butter or olive oil and fresh herbs.



Water You Dewing Week

It felt just right to have a water-themed week at The Nature Place. A good part of the typical day at camp revolves around water. Staying hydrated is the first step towards a good day in the summer heat. There would be no fun on a hot day spent mostly outdoors without water. Many activities at the camp revolve around water: our daily swimming lessons at the pond, water play, watering in the garden, overnight canoeing trip to Cedar Pond, and a very Nature Place specific activity: mucking (a.k.a. wading in the Fairy Stream), named after Mr. Muck, a long-ago activity leader, who taught our campers how to pan gold. We celebrate the rain. When liquid sunshine starts to pour from the skies the joyful camp life goes on.

In the kitchen, we created a refreshing drink that would have pleased even the fairies living in the Fairy Stream. Campers, working in groups, chose their flavor combination from the wide variety of available ingredients and each group created their very own “dew”.

2 cups mixed berries and/or fruit
(peaches, pears, watermelon,
apples, cantaloupe or honeydew)

1 juice of a citrus fruit (lemon,
lime, grapefruit or orange)

A few springs of tea herbs (mint,
lemon verbena, lemon balm, or
chamomile)

Cool Water

Fruit and Herb Infused Water a.k.a. Fairy Dew

Wash the fruit and berries. Cut up the fruit. Except for strawberries, berries should be used whole. Put your selection of berries, fruit, and herbs along with the freshly squeezed citrus juice into a two-quart mason jar or a similar size jar. Fill to the top with water. Put on the lid. Refrigerate and let infuse for 6-24 hours.



Lettuce Turnip the Beet Week

The beat was surely on. Camp was so much fun. In the garden, the children made sure that the lettuce planted during the first and second week was doing well. In the kitchen, we tasted raw turnips, and roasted beets were used to make a pink beet hummus. Initially, some campers were skeptical about our recipe, but the mood started to change as we got to work. The low-tech method of mashing beans with mortar and pestle is always met with enthusiasm in the camp kitchen. The dip came out tasty and looked just right in blue corn chip cups. Most campers were sold on their pink snack.

2/3 cup cooked chickpeas
1/8 cup olive oil
1/3 cup mashed roasted beets
1 tablespoon tahini (optional)
1 small clove of garlic
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
1/8 cup water

Beet Hummus

Mash the chickpeas using a mortar and pestle or use a potato masher. Put the a garlic through garlic press. Add the remaining ingredients and blend together. Or: blend all ingredients in a blender.



Flock Together Week

The sourdough culture started during the first week of the camp was ready to be used. The wild yeast and bacteria colonized our mixture of flour and water. It was time to use it in an unexpected way. The refrigerator held cartons of eggs collected in the garden. We were making a sourdough chocolate coffee cake! Although sourdough starters are usually used in bread and other savory baked goods, this time we used it in cake batter. This method allowed us to make soft, spongy cake while using less butter and eggs than regular cakes. The taste certainly didn't give away our secret ingredient!

Sourdough Chocolate Coffee Cake

For the sourdough

1/4 cup sourdough starter
3/4 cup all-purpose flour
water

Mix the sourdough culture with flour and water the night before baking (the sourdough should be of a consistency of pancake batter). Cover it loosely and keep at room temperature overnight.

For the cake

3/4 cup sugar + 1 tablespoon for sprinkling
2 eggs
1/3 canola, safflower or coconut oil
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
5 ounces semi-sweet chocolate, melted and cooled
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup sourdough from the previous night

For the Sourdough

Mix the sourdough starter with flour and water the night before baking (the sourdough should be the consistency of pancake batter). Cover it loosely and keep at room temperature overnight.

For the Cake

Preheat the oven to 350 °F. Combine sugar, eggs, oil, vanilla, and melted chocolate. Sift the dry ingredients together and add to the wet mixture. Gently stir in the sourdough. Put into a greased and floured 8" x 5" loaf pan. Sprinkle with sugar. Bake for 30-35 minutes or until set.



Till We Meet Again Week

Many bittersweet moments filled the last week of camp as we said our final goodbyes to The Nature Place community of 2023, to our friends, to our beautiful campus full of magic and fun, and to the summer.

The campers savored their last swim at the pond and all the festive fun (picture fully clothed members of the administrative team “falling” into the pond due to a pirate attack); the last climb on the climbing tree (so much faster than on week 1), and the final creative activity at Nature’s Playground. The children visited the garden to say goodbye to the chickens and to harvest what the garden had to offer. We used the gifts of the garden to create a healthy, celebratory snack. This time, the campers were given no recipe just basic instructions. Choosing from the selection of available vegetables and herbs, they made fresh salsa.

Make-Your-Own Fresh Salsa

Salsa (choose at least 4 ingredients from the list)

- 1/2 cup cooked corn kernels
- 1/2 cup cooked black, cannellini beans or chickpeas
- 1/4 cup diced red or white onions
- 3/4 cup diced cherry tomatoes
- 1/2 cup diced bell peppers
- 1/2 cup diced cucumber
- 1 jalapeno, diced

Dressing/Base

- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar, red wine vinegar or fresh lemon/lime juice
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil or canola oil
- Pinch of salt

Dressing/Flavoring (choose some or all)

- 1/2 teaspoon honey
- 1 clove of garlic, pressed or very finely chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 spring fresh oregano or 1 tablespoon minced cilantro
- Dash of ground black pepper
- Dash of sweet paprika or cayenne pepper

Combine the ingredients for the salsa in a large bowl.

Combine the ingredients for the dressing in a small mason jar. Secure the lid and give it a few shakes until the dressing is well combined.

Toss the salad with the dressing. Enjoy with corn chips or as a side dish completing your dinner.



Throughout the summer each camp day started with Morning Share, a gathering of the whole camp with skits, songs, and special guests. On the very last morning of the season, we said goodbye to our beloved Morning Share skit characters: Klaus Von Dance (who came all the way from Berlin, Germany and spent a week on a quest for a disco ball, only to find a beautiful planet called Earth), Tiger Barbecue (a man who went on an expedition to Australia in search of the Chicken Man), Jamen (the host of Morning Share), Jamen Not-Real-ington (who hosted the morning skits when Jamen mysteriously disappeared), Willie Water (who brought the gift of water), Chicken Man (who has been with The Nature Place for as long as we can remember), Bob (whom everyone loved), Soapy Steve (who was so-so soapy and occasionally made others very soapy), Sunscreen Steve, the Penguin (who reminded us daily how to stay safe on a bright summer day), and The Flower Fairy (who has been delivering flowers to those celebrating their birthday from the beginning of Nature Place times).

One of our closing rituals followed after the final skit: our friends from the skits disappeared beyond a rainbow screen to be frozen in time, of course, only until the next camp season.

Till We Meet Again!



