Baltimore Woods
Nature Center
Nature in your hands

The Baltimore Woods Nature in the City Program

2025-2026 Program Overview and Teacher Information

Opening new worlds of discovery for every student through nature exploration

Welcome to the Nature in the City Program!

Contact Information

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What is Baltimore Woods Nature Center?

Part of the Central New York community since 1966, Baltimore Woods Nature Center, Inc. (BWNC) is a not-for-profit (501(c)(3)) environmental organization whose headquarters are located at Baltimore Woods in Marcellus, New York, about 12 miles west of Syracuse.

What Baltimore Woods does...

Our mission is to connect communities and nature in wisdom and wonder. A leader in facilitating opportunities for people to build personal connections to nature, we offer immersive programs year-round for all ages to participate in engaging experiences and place-based exploration at the 270-acre nature preserve and across urban, suburban, and rural landscapes of Central New York. Over 6 miles of hiking trails are open to the public from dawn to dusk 365 days a year free of charge.

What is Nature in the City?

For over twenty years, the Baltimore Woods *Nature in the City* program has been bringing authentic hands-on/minds-on natural science learning to K-5th grade urban school children across the Syracuse School District. This innovative program and partnership connects thousands of students in all 22 elementary schools and alternative programs to nature through science exploration and nature play each school year.

Each lesson provides a relevant, meaningful and fun way to learn about science through nature and local examples. Each school year:

- Every classroom receives three, one-hour interactive science lessons with a common theme, tied to your SCSD Science pacing calendar.
- Our educators bring the program to the students, reducing our carbon footprint and conserving transportation costs and valuable instruction time.
- Students take walking field trips within greenspaces to connect classroom learning directly to the outdoors.
- *Nature in the City* lessons support teachers and enhance the science being taught in the classroom.
- Supported by the Syracuse City School District, and local businesses, foundations, and individual donors; *Nature in the City* is a great way to kick off a lifetime of science learning!

How does Nature in the City fit with New York State Learning Standards?

Nature in the City lessons correlate with the Elementary Science Core Curriculum. Programs chiefly focus on and support Standard 4: *The Living Environment.* Baltimore Woods provides opportunities for students to have direct experiences with the living environment by bringing natural science education into the classroom and exploring the greenspaces around your school.

Teachers are provided with professional development opportunities and can be provided with additional classroom materials, pre– and post–lesson activities designed by our education team, and can even have students email questions to us at connect@baltimorewoods.org.

Program Overview

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Nature in the City

Background Information

City parks and greenspaces within walking distance of schools can be overlooked resources containing an array of cultural, ecological, and historic assets. They serve as a springboard to teach skills and cultivate a love of learning and sensible stewardship for our environment.

In 2002, Baltimore Woods created *Nature in the City* to showcase urban ecology and engage young children in learning about the culture, geography, natural resources and ecology of their neighborhoods. Starting in one school as a pilot program, now the program reaches all 22 Syracuse City School District Elementary Schools and Alternative Programs, visiting every K-5th grade classroom three times a year.

Awards

Nature in the City is an award winning program. It has received: the Environmental Quality Award, the highest recognition that the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) bestows on any organization (2004), the Museums for America Award from the Federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (2004), the Women Taking the Lead to Save Our Planet Award from the Syracuse Commission for Women (2009), and award recognition from the Syracuse Mayor’s office.

Teacher Information

Program Logistics

Program Length—*Nature in the City* programs are 1 hour in length. Teachers are responsible for supervision at all times and are expected to remain with the class for the entire program., including outside.

You will receive a grade level sign up form with all three of your assigned Nature in the City dates. **We'll need the following information to confirm the scheduling of programs at your school:** Number of classrooms, lesson start time, room numbers, number of students, and teacher name(s) and e-mails. If your classroom needs any accommodations, there is a section on the form to provide details or you can send an email to katier@baltimorewoods.org

Preparing for an Outdoor Program

During lessons with an outdoor component, students, teachers, and chaperones should dress according to the weather. In inclement weather, outdoor activities may be shortened, or indoor activities will be provided, **but unless the weather is severe we will still go outside.** Please have students wear hats, gloves, boots, and coats in the cold weather and rain gear when needed. Clothes and apparel may get dirty or wet on outdoor programs—please advise your students of this.

Cancellation Policy

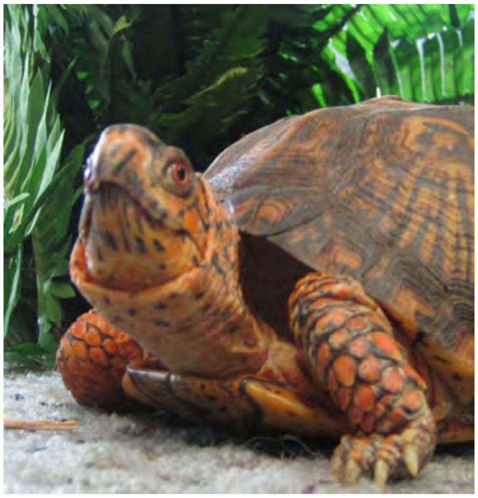
Nature in the City content and schedule is developed with the Supervisor of Science and Technology. Baltimore Woods will make every attempt to reschedule programs canceled due to school closings and honors the weather cancellation policies of the Syracuse City School District. In the case of severe weather, Baltimore Woods will determine if the program should be canceled. We cannot guarantee rescheduling, but will work with the contact teacher to try and determine an alternative date. If you need to cancel or re-schedule a lesson, please send an email to katier@baltimorewoods.org.

Field Trip Funding

Transportation—*Nature in the City* programs are performed within the City of Syracuse limits to encourage awareness and appreciation for the nature each child is exposed to on a daily basis. Funding for the third grade field trip to Elmwood Park has historically been funded through a grant by Onondaga County's Save the Rain Education Program that is renewed on an annual basis. Should any other field trips be arranged, transportation to the program location is the responsibility of the teacher or school.

Kindergarten

These seasonal programs introduce students to the natural world all around them.



Learning Standards:

Living Environment

Key Ideas I, V, & VI

K-LSI-1

K-ESS2-2

K-ESS3-1

Habitat Hunt

Fall

This program will take place fully outdoors with your students, weather permitting, or can be taught with an indoor component for an introduction followed by an outdoor nature walk. Staff will arrive to your building at the scheduled time and deliver a one-hour program which includes an introduction, sharing of different examples of animal habitats, a habitat "relay race" to reinforce the idea that different animals live in different habitats and a nature walk with a scavenger hunt to identify different habitats that are located around your school grounds. To directly support your "Trees and Weather" focus area, the lesson will take advantage of the fall season to discuss how trees are an important habitat for many species and how the trees are changing with current weather. What happens to the animals that use trees as habitat in the summer? How might they be preparing for the weather around their habitat to change?

Animals in Motion

Winter

This program is all about how different local animals move around in their habitat to get food and water and that they move in different ways! We'll review animal habitats (from lesson 1), experience "feely bags" which are bags that will contain different natural items (for example, a turkey feather) and students will have to reach in and guess what the item and animal might be – and think about how they might move. Through games, close-up visuals of local animals, and interactive discussion, we'll explore motion in the animal kingdom including walking/running, swimming, flying, and hopping!

It's Alive (or is it?)

Spring

The city of Syracuse has many living and nonliving things that are all important in nature, but how can you tell the difference? Using several local examples, students will learn the 5 things that all living things have in common, be able to describe what plants and animals need to survive, and make close-up observations of a special visitor (one of our box turtles!) to evaluate how you can tell if something is living.

Grade 1

These programs examine the cycles and seasonal changes surrounding students.

Learning Standards:

Living Environment

Key Ideas I, III, & IV

Pumpkin Circle

Fall

Get in the fall spirit with some hands-on pumpkin science! Just like all living things, pumpkins go through a life cycle and need specific conditions—like sunlight—to grow. Students will explore the circle of life as they follow the journey of a pumpkin from seed to fruit and back to seed again. They will discover how weather and other environmental factors play a crucial role in the pumpkin's life cycle. Part of this lesson will take place outside, weather permitting.

Maple Magic

Spring

Maple sugaring is a scientific process with a rich history, and students experience an up-close tour of a stand of sugar maple trees and see each step in the process of collecting sap to boiling it for syrup, exploring some of the history and science behind it along the way - including a comparative taste test to see if they can pick our real maple syrup. Each part of the tree has a job to do, and the seasonal changes happening to the air and weather during the Central New York spring trigger this exciting annual process!

Journey of a Seed

Spring

Plants play an important role for many animals in our local ecosystems including food, shelter and more! Have you ever seen a squirrel running around with acorns in its cheeks? Or caught a dandelion seed blowing in the wind? During this newly developed lesson, students will use local examples of plants to observe and classify different seeds, reinforcing life cycles and how plants reproduce, spread, and grow in different ecosystems. Part of this lesson will take place outside, weather permitting.

Grade 2

A series focused on how we can use science to learn more about the things we see outside our windows every day.

Learning Standards:

Living Environment

Key Ideas I, III, IV & VI

Scientific Inquiry

Key Ideas I, III

2-PS1-1

2-PS1-4

2-PS1-2

2-LS2-2

The Science of Snow

Winter

This program aligns with the "Solids and Liquids" science content using the star of our local winter season - snowflakes! Using the story of Wilson "Snowflake" Bentley, students will learn about the unique properties of snow that were discovered over many years and attempts to photograph them. Nature in the City educators will join your classroom with a "snow laboratory" to demonstrate experiments that show how temperature impacts the state of matter and guide a few games. We will provide you with materials (snowflake catchers and magnifying glasses) to either bring snow into your classroom or take your class outside for a winter nature walk (weather permitting) to experience snow ourselves, working on our power of observation.

Breakfast for Birds

Winter

Some birds look for food in pebbles, sand, and silt and each species has a unique beak depending on preferred food and foraging habitat. Using local birds as examples, students will develop observation skills by watching for birds looking for food in their own schoolyard. How do birds use beaks that are various shapes and sizes to forage for different kinds of food? This lesson explores different types of feeding methods using hands-on activities where students actually try how different beaks work.

Bugs, Blooms, and Birds!

Spring

What role do insects and plants play in ecosystems? Insects are one of the most abundant and diverse groups of organisms, and they play an important role in ecosystems. Through pollination, plants have a mutualistic relationship with multiple pollinators including insects (who also rely on insects as a source of food). Through activities and games where students get to experience being a pollinator, they will develop a clearer understanding of the different ways plants and insects are important in ecosystems.

Grade 3

This series was developed with Onondaga County Save the Rain and focuses on the movement of water through the City of Syracuse, the impact humans have on the health of that water and simple practices that can be implemented to help keep it clean.

Learning Standards:

Living Environment

Key Ideas I, II, & IV

3-ESS3-1

Save the Rain

Fall

Water flows across our local landscape, and green infrastructure can help us keep Onondaga Lake clean. During this one-hour program which includes an introduction, overview of the water cycle and definition of a watershed, demonstration of how a watershed works using a watershed model (including a demonstration of how green infrastructure can help to clean up a watershed, such as in the City of Syracuse to help protect Onondaga Lake), and a ‘traveling water drop’ game that demonstrates where a drop of water may travel within our local watershed. To directly support your “Water and Climate” focus area, the lesson will focus on our local Onondaga Lake watershed. How does water flow across our local landscape? How might the quality of that water be impacted as it flows? How might we try to clean up water that may become polluted or pick up trash as it is moving on the landscape?

Creatures of the Deep

Spring

Students get an up-close encounter with some of the aquatic creatures they can help protect by cleaning up Onondaga Lake when they examine pond water in the classroom. This program will also incorporate concepts from the SCSD science curriculum, including adaptations, life-cycles, and metamorphosis.

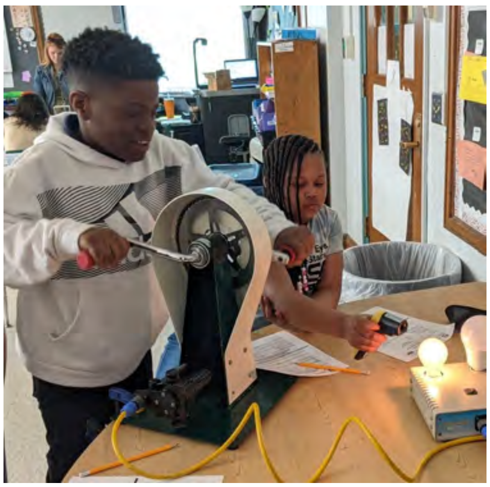
Elmwood Park Field Trip

Bus provided (Dependent on grant funding)

Clean freshwater habitats are important for us as well as the animals that inhabit them. This program takes place outdoors at Elmwood Park and students will investigate different parts of the stream (Furnace Brook) to think about the role of water in our lives, what lives in the water, how it flows across the landscape, what determines water quality, and the roles that green and gray infrastructure play in our city.

Grade 4

This series focuses heavily on energy in our environment. From generating electricity using a hand crank in the classroom to exploring local food web examples outside of your school, students will get an up-close look into how energy is a part of our everyday lives!



Learning Standards:

4-PS3-Energy

4-PS4– Waves and Information

4-PS3-2

4-PS3-4

5-PS3-1

5-LS1-1

5-LS2-1

Biome Blitz

Winter

Explore how landforms, soil, and climate shape the homes of plants and animals! Students will learn about biomes and ecosystems by building their own miniature biomes in the classroom. We'll discover how climate and land features—like mountains, valleys, and glacial soils—create unique conditions that support different kinds of life. Using our local biome as an example, we'll dive into how landforms affect everything from the soil to the animals that must adapt to changing seasons.

Bright Ideas

Winter

Energy is around us all the time in many different forms. Students will rotate through 3 hands-on experimental stations that demonstrate ways that energy can be transformed, reinforcing the definition of energy and that is all around us in our daily lives. Note: One of these stations will need to be teacher-led and materials will be provided.

From the Bottom Up

Spring

Using an example of an urban top predator (Cooper's Hawk), students will explore how energy flows through local food chains. How do certain environmental factors, like pollution, affect the survival, growth, and reproduction of animals up the food chain? After an introduction inside your classroom, we'll head outside for a relay activity and look for up-close examples of food chains in your schoolyard.

Grade 5

This investigative series teaches students about the effects of carbon dioxide on our planet, the energy in food webs, and how the chemistry of water can influence local ecosystems.

It's Gettin' Hot in Here

Fall

Why is Earth considered the "goldilocks" planet? This lesson uses the case study of fossil fuel combustion to demonstrate energy transformation and explore what happens when CO_2 is released into the atmosphere, including the greenhouse effect. Through demonstrations and a game, students will explore the atmospheres Mars, Venus, and Earth to compare their conditions and have a discussion of how we might reduce CO_2 emissions on our planet. (Designed to support/reinforce/review The Earth & Sun and Living Systems Unit/Humans & the Environment Humanities)

Wetland Wonders

Winter

Students will explore the importance of wetlands as vital ecosystems that provide a range of environmental functions and support diverse species of plants and animals. Wetlands demonstrate the interaction between water and various substances, such as minerals, organic matter, and pollutants. The water in wetlands often serves as a solvent, dissolving and carrying substances that can be filtered or processed by the plants and organisms within the ecosystem. Students will explore how wetlands reduce flooding, filter pollution, and prevent erosion through hands-on group activities, while also learning about their rich biodiversity.

Exploring Urban Ecosystems

Spring

Using the greenspaces around your school, we'll take an in-depth look at the ecosystems that the City of Syracuse can support, and how living and nonliving components are interconnected - including the things we may not always be able to see like decomposers. Students will work together in groups to build a stable ecosystem using colorful Jenga blocks representing producers and consumers and walk through interactive stories about local ecosystems in Syracuse. After Ecosystem Jenga, we'll head outside with hand microscopes and field ID guidebooks to determine different producers, consumers, and decomposers around their school and build a series of food chains and a food web to represent them.

Learning Standards:

5-PS3-1

5-LS1-1

5-LS2-1

5-ESS2-1

5-ESS 3-1

In addition to this *Nature in the City* series in your classroom, fifth-graders will travel to Baltimore Woods Nature Center in the fall on a SCSD-funded field trip. This provides students with an opportunity to connect to Baltimore Woods Nature Center and to also explore the various ecosystems with their *Nature in the City* educators.

Stay Connected with Us!

Have questions or a story to share? You cand your students can reach the education team anytime at connect@baltimorewoods.org.

Resources for Teachers

Need other activities or materials for your students? Email katier@baltimorewoods.org.

Tag us! #NatureInTheCity

Baltimore Woods Nature Center

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Baltimore Woods is only 20-30 minutes from Syracuse!

- Six miles of trails through forests, meadows, streams, and ponds
- Open dawn to dusk every day with free admission
- Imaginative nature play area
- Year-round educational programs for families and adult nature enthusiasts
- Nature day camps, homeschool adventures, and preschool explorations
- Bird song and fresh air for all to enjoy!

Thank you to the many sponsors and partners that make Nature in the City possible!

Syracuse City School District • National Grid •
Onondaga County Save the Rain • Green Family Foundation •
KeyBank • Bob Hurka & Susan Stewart
Dorothy and Marshall M. Reisman Foundation •
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NITC K-5 Lessons and SCSD Curricula Connections 23-24SY

Grade **Standards**	**SCSD FOSS Focus**	**Grade** **Standards**	**NITC K-5 Lesson Activity and Connection**
K **LS1-1** **ESS2-2** **ESS3-1** **ESS3-3** **PS1-1** **PS2-1 &** **PS2-2** **ESS2-1** **ESS3-2** **PS3-1** **PS3-2**	• **Animals Two by Two**: ○ Students study land and water animals, their needs for survival, and their habitats. They learn about animal structures and adaptations. • **Materials and Motion**: ○ Focus on motion caused by pushes and pulls, and the properties of materials like wood, paper, and fabric. • **Trees and Weather**: ○ Observations of trees, their parts, and seasonal changes. Daily weather tracking and understanding weather conditions.	**K** **ESS2-1** **PS2-1** **PS2-2** **LS1-1** **ESS2-2**	• **Habitat Hunt**: ○ Aligns with *Trees and Weather and Animals Two By Two*. Students explore different habitats and the importance of trees for various species. • **Animals in Motion**: ○ Supports *Animals Two By Tw*o and *Materials and Motion*. Discusses local animal movements and habitats. While incorporating collaborative interactive activities. • **It's Alive! (Or is it?)**: ○ Complements *Animals Two By Two*. Compares living and non-living things, with local examples and activities.
1st **ESS1-2** **ESS2-1** **ESS3-2** **PS3-1** **LS1-1 & 1-2** **LS3-1** **PS4-1-4**	• **Air and Weather**: ○ Observes daily changes in air temperature, weather patterns, and the movement of celestial objects. • **Plants and Animals**: ○ Investigates how young plants and animals survive, focusing on structures and functions. • **Sound and Light**: ○ Explores sound production and light interaction with objects, comparing human and animal senses.	**1st** **LS1-1 & 1-2** **LS3-1** **LS1-1 & 1-2** **LS3-1** **ESS2-1** **PS3-1** **LS1-1 & 1-2** **LS3-1**	• **Pumpkin Circle:** ○ Relates to *Plants and Animals* and *Air and Weather*. Demonstrates the life cycle of a pumpkin, including seed dispersal and plant growth**.** • **Maple Magic:** ○Enhances *Plants and Animals* and *Air and Weather*. Focuses on the life cycle of sugar maple trees and the process of making maple syrup. • **Journey of a Seed :** ○ Connects with *Plants and Animals*. Uses local examples of plants to observe and classify different seeds, reinforcing life cycles**,** and how plants reproduce, spread and grow in different ecosystems.
2nd **LS2-1** **LS2-2** **LS4-1** **ESS1-1** **ESS2-1** **ESS2-2** **PS1-1** **ESS2-3** **PS1-4**	• **Insects and Plants**: ○ Studies the life cycles of insects and plants, their interactions, and feeding relationships. • **Pebbles, Sand, and Silt**: ○ Observes properties of rocks and soil, weathering, erosion, and how water affects earth materials. • **Solids and Liquids**: ○ Compares properties of solids and liquids, and their reversible and irreversible changes.	**2nd** **ESS2-3** **2ESS2-1** **LS1-1** **LS2-1** **LS1-1** **LS1-2** **LS3-1**	• **Science of Snow:** ○ Complements *Solids and Liquids*. Examines snowflakes' unique properties and the impact of temperature on states of matter. • **Breakfast for Birds:** ○ Supports *Insects and Plants* and *Pebbles Sand and Silt:* Introduces local birds and their adaptations for foraging in various environments including pebbles, sand, and silt environments. • **Bugs, Blooms, and Birds:** ○ Enhances *Insects and Plants.* Explores pollination and mutualistic relationships in ecosystems through hands-on activities.

3rd **ESS2-1** **ESS2-2** **ESS3-1** **ESS2-3** **LS2-1** **LS4-1** **LS4-3** **LS4-4** **PS2-1-4**	• **Water and Climate**: ○ Investigates the water cycle, climate, and water on Earth's surface and its impact on weather. • **Structures of Life**: ○ Studies the structures and functions of living organisms, including humans, plants, and animals. • **Motion and Matter**: ○ Explores forces, motion, and the properties of matter through investigations.	**3rd** **ESS2-1** **ESS2-3** **LS2-1** **LS4-3** **LS4-4**	• **The Story of Save the Rain**: ○ Directly supports *Water and Climate*. Focuses on water flow, pollution, and the impact on local Onondaga Lake watershed. • **Creatures of The Deep**: ○ Complements *Structures of Life*. Investigates aquatic animals' adaptations and life cycles. • **Elmwood Park Stream Field Trip**: ○ Enhances *Water and Climate* and *Structures of Life*. Hands-on investigation of water quality and aquatic life in a local stream.
4th **PS3-1-4** **ESS3-1** **PS4-2** **LS1-1** **LS1-2** **ESS1-1** **ESS2-1 &** **ESS2-2** **ESS3-2**	• **Energy**: ○ Explores the presence of energy in various forms (motion, electric currents, sound, light, heat) and its transfer between places and forms. • **Environments**: ○ Focuses on the environmental factors that affect plants and animals and each other. Studying organism structures functions and their survival adaptations. • **Soils, Rocks, and Landforms**: ○ Students engage with soils, rocks, and Earth's landscape through modeling, topographic maps, and stream tables. They study weathering and erosion, interpret data, and make predictions based on evidence.	**4th** **ESS2-2** **LS1-1** **PS3-1** **PS3-2** **PS3-3** **PS3-4** **PS3-2** **ESS2-1** **LS1-1** **PS3-1**	• **Biome Blitz**: ○ Supports *Environments* and *Soils, Rocks, and Landforms* by exploring local biomes and their characteristics. • **Bright Ideas**: ○ Reinforces the *Energy* kit by demonstrating energy transformation through hands on experiments. • **From the Bottom Up** : ○ Builds on concepts from the *Energy* and *Environments* kits by illustrating how energy and pollution flow through local urban food chains.
5th **PS1-1-4** **LS1-1** **LS1-2** **ESS1-1** **ESS2-1 &2-2** **ESS3-2**	• **Mixtures and Solutions**: ○ Students learn about the properties of mixtures and solutions, including concentration, saturation, and chemical reactions. • **Living Systems**: ○ Explores the circulatory, respiratory, digestive, and excretory systems in humans, animals and plant vascular systems. • **Earth and Sun**: ○ Investigates the Earth's relationship with the sun, including shadows, solar energy, and the water cycle.	**5th** **ESS2-2** **ESS3-2** **PS1-1** **PS1-3** **PS1-1** **PS1-3** **LS2-1**	• **Hot in Here**: ○ Directly supports the Earth and Sun Unit. Reinforces role of the sun and compares Earth to other planets in our solar system to explore similarities and differences in their atmospheres. • **Wetland Wonders**: ○ Directly supports *Mixtures and Solutions* as students investigate water's unique properties through exploration of how chemistry influences our local lakes. . • **Exploring Urban Ecosystems**: ○ Connects with *The Living Systems Unit*. Exploring the Urban environment plant and animal life and reviewing parts and functions of examples found in this system.