Children & Nature: Nature-Based Play Feature Details
To clarify the cost, resource outlet, and age appropriateness of the features, a key appears at the bottom of each feature description:

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<th>Inexpensive</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Expensive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source Locally</td>
<td>Remote Purchase</td>
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<td>3+</td>
<td>8+</td>
<td>All Ages</td>
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Cost is only an estimate and largely dependent on final design and how goods are procured; estimate of cost bracket is to give a general idea, not final estimate.

Resource outlet is broken down into three categories: Pursue Donation - meaning materials are readily available in the wild but a landowner/business owner will need to be contacted about donations; Source Locally - means that materials may need to be purchased but the item is likely available from a local vendor; and, lastly, Purchase - meaning a prefabricated item will need to be order from a specialty vendor.

Please note all photos are for example only and are not to be considered a photo of the final product.
Description: Typical garden structures are transformed into whimsical pieces of inspiration throughout the park area. Each of these elements are supporting pieces to the overall design and may be used as an addition to or independently of any particular play area.

Behavioral and Developmental Goals: Sensory stimulation; exposure to creative expression; opportunities for unique storytelling and dialogue.

Materials Needed: Largely dependent on artists’ design. Defer to artist for any additional materials that may be needed to support and secure the pieces structurally.

Expertise Needed: Artists and Fabricators are needed to design and create the pieces. Crafts people familiar with carpentry, metal work, and/or cement work may be needed to help with installation.

Appropriate Site: No specific requirements; dependent on input and overall design.
Boulder Climbing & Rock Stacking Area

Description: Boulders, large rocks, and small rocks are scattered across the bare ground or in a bed of pea gravel. The rocks may be naturally occurring or placed or a combination of both. Various sizes of rocks allow for both climbing and scrambling or carefully stacking and counting.

Behavioral and Developmental Goals: Physical exercise; balance and coordination; fine and large motor skills; risk-taking assessment

Materials Needed: Multiple sizes of rocks, stones, and small boulders. Rocks for climbing should be heavier, sturdier, and placed in a configuration that is safe and secure. Smaller rocks of various type, shape, color, and weight will allow for maximum engagement and interest.

Expertise Needed: Landscape Designer or Construction Worker familiar with choosing rocks, safely moving, and securely placing large rocks would be preferred to ensure climbing rocks are appropriately installed. Minimal grading may need to be performed to allow rocks to be placed properly and the use of a backhoe or bobcat may be needed.

Appropriate Site: An area with large rocks already present is preferred but by no means required. The site may be flat or hilly. If hilly, special precautions should be taken to successful build the boulders/rocks into the hillside.
**Chimes**

**Description:** Chimes made out of metal, wood, or found materials are hung amongst the branches of trees or on free-standing frames.

**Behavioral and Developmental Goals:** Education and experience about wind and weather processes; sensory stimulation; exposure to unconventional materials for familiar objects.

**Materials Needed:** Chimes may be purchased or made depending on desired effect or impact. If chimes are made, materials that may be needed could include scrape metals pieces, old tools, silverware, hollow pieces of wood, or hardware - for example. To hang the chimes, materials such as unobstructed tree branches, secure frame (built or natural), and hardware for hanging chimes securely are needed.

**Expertise Needed:** None.

**Appropriate Site:** Chimes may be best located near a gathering area for maximum enjoyment and exposure. Area with mature trees with solid branches is ideal.

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Climbing Logs

Description: Large fallen logs create a natural jungle gym for climbing and scrambling upon.

Behavioral and Developmental Goals: Physical exercise; balance and coordination; risk-taking assessment

Materials Needed: Large, sturdy tree trunks and logs that are in free from rot or decay. Possibly additional lumber and hardware to secure logs.

Expertise Needed: Woodworker or Arborist familiar with wood types and choosing high quality wood pieces. A Woodworker or Construction Worker may be needed for assembling climbing logs in a secure manner.

Appropriate Site: An area on the edge of a wooded area or a clearing within a wooded area with room to lay logs and/or present fallen logs to lean wood upon.
**Covered Wagon Walk**

**Description:** A traditional covered wagon is placed directly on the ground or a small, elevated platform to allow children to easily access the interior of this iconic piece of US history.

**Behavioral and Developmental Goals:** Storytelling; historical education about pioneers, travels, and the homesteading; imaginative play

**Materials Needed:** Prefabricated covered wagons may be purchased, or one can be constructed out of raw materials. If using raw materials, a metal frame would need to be fabricated or found to create the traditional shape and then covered with heavy-duty canvas. With either scenario, a wooden platform will need to be constructed to place the covered wagon top on.

**Expertise Needed:** If a prefabricated covered wagon is used, there may be minimal expertise needed beyond a woodworker/construction worker to build the wooden platform. If creating it from raw materials, a woodworker is strongly recommended as well as someone with access to and familiarity with industrial sewing.

**Appropriate Site:** No particular site necessary, though an open, prairie-like atmosphere may be most fitting for this element.
Culvert Tunnels

Description: A typical roadside engineering item becomes a secret cave or tunnel to another country or hiding place for young kids’ imagination to run free.

Behavioral and Developmental Goals: Imaginative play; physical exercise

Materials Needed: Corrugated metal or reinforced concrete culverts.

Expertise Needed: A Civil Engineer or Construction Worker familiar with road construction and materials would be very helpful in choosing and placing the culverts properly.

Appropriate Site: The main necessity is a small change in grade (either a natural hill or embankment, or a man-made one) that can be altered/disturbed in order to install the culvert.
**Dirt Digging Pit**

**Description:** An area designated specifically for dirty, messy, fun play! With digging tools and an imagination, playing in the dirt becomes searching for buried treasure, digging to China, or creating a dirt castle.

**Behavioral and Developmental Goals:** Imaginative play; physical exercise; cooperation and collaboration.

**Materials Needed:** Dirt and digging tools. Depending on the quality of dirt on site, clean loose black dirt may need to be brought in to fill area a bit.

**Expertise Needed:** If fill dirt is needed, the use of a bobcat maybe needed.

**Appropriate Site:** No specific site needed, simply an open with minimal vegetation.
**Dirt Sliding Area**

**Description:** With a slight hill and open ground with bare soil, children are able to experience the joy and exhilaration of a slide and the marvel of getting dirty at the same time.

**Behavioral and Developmental Goals:** Imaginative play; physical exercise

**Materials Needed:** Bare soil and, possibly, cardboard to for riders.

**Expertise Needed:** If no natural occurring hill exists, someone familiar with soil types and access to a bobcat will be helpful in making the necessary grading changes and soil compaction.

**Appropriate Site:** The main necessity is a small change in grade (either a natural hill or embankment, or a man-made one) that can be altered/disturbed in order to install the slides.
**Fort Construction**

**Description:** Logs, sticks, stumps, and lumber are available for kids to be used to build temporary or semi-permanent structures. Existing trees may be used as supporting structures. Access to hardware and tools depends on the age the kids and the desired lifetime of the forts. Forts may be built up over time and periodically dismantled to start the process over, or the forts built may be completely temporary and be dismantled at the end of each visit.

**Behavioral and Developmental Goals:** Imaginative play; cooperation; collaboration; problem-solving; planning and execution of ideas

**Materials Needed:** Stumps, small logs, large sticks, and raw lumber; possibly hardware and tools depending on style of fort area; large, sturdy trees for supporting structures.

**Expertise Needed:** No specific expertise needed. If a semi-permanent structure is needed, it may be helpful to have someone familiar with carpentry periodically check-in to make sure the structure is relatively sound.

**Appropriate Site:** A clearing in the woods or an area adjacent to a wooded area would allow for greatest access
**Hollow Tree Slides**

**Description:** Large, hollowed out tree trunks are sanded and smoothed to create slides that fade into the background until the moment they are discovered.

**Behavioral and Developmental Goals:** Imaginative play; physical exercise

**Materials Needed:** Large, hollowed out tree trunks of various lengths and, possibly, cardboard to for riders.

**Expertise Needed:** A woodworker capable of carving and sanding out the tree trunks into smooth slides is needed.

**Appropriate Site:** An area of slight incline where logs can be securely propped or embedded into the soil slightly would be ideal. Area could be wooded or open.
Log & Stump Balance Course

Description: Large tree stumps are cut into various sizes and clustered into a group to create a natural jungle gym.

Behavioral and Developmental Goals: Physical exercise; coordination and balance.

Materials Needed: Large tree stumps/logs of various sizes with level tops and bottoms.

Expertise Needed: Use of a chain saw is likely.

Appropriate Site: A level area with enough overhead clearance to allow children to climb easily.
**Description:** Marimbas, xylophones, chimes, and other musical instruments are gathered in one area for exploratory musical play.

**Behavioral and Developmental Goals:** Sensory stimulation; exposure to creative expression; opportunities for unique storytelling and dialogue.

**Materials Needed:** Depends on musical instruments desired.

**Expertise Needed:** None necessary.

**Appropriate Site:** No specific requirements; dependent on input and overall design.
**Prairie Plant Maze**

**Description:** Tall flowers, shrubs, and grasses are laid out to create a small maze.

**Behavioral and Developmental Goals:** problem-solving; spatial awareness; opportunities for unique storytelling and dialogue; plant identification

**Materials Needed:** Plants.

**Expertise Needed:** Knowledge of plants, planting design, and maintenance.

**Appropriate Site:** Plants will perform best in an open, sunny area.
Rain Garden

Description: Native grasses and flowers fill a basin shaped area gathers rain water and slowly lets it infiltrate into the ground. Sizes may vary.

Behavioral and Developmental Goals: learning about natural processes of water, weather and plant growth; plant identification

Materials Needed: Plants and well-draining soil.

Expertise Needed: Knowledge of plants and the design and maintenance of a rain garden.

Appropriate Site: A naturally low-lying area where water usually gathers is ideal.
Teepee Gathering Area

Description: A traditional Native American teepee is placed directly on the ground or a small, elevated platform to allow children to easily access the interior of this iconic piece of US history.

Behavioral and Developmental Goals: Storytelling; historical education about Native peoples; imaginative play

Materials Needed: Prefabricated teepees may be purchased, or one can be constructed out of raw materials. If using raw materials, a wooden frame would need to be fabricated or found to create the traditional shape and then covered with heavy-duty canvas. With either scenario, a wooden platform will need to be constructed to place the teepee on.

Expertise Needed: If a prefabricated teepee is used, there may be minimal expertise needed beyond a woodworker/construction worker to build the wooden platform. If creating it from raw materials, a woodworker is strongly recommended as well as someone with access to and familiarity with industrial sewing.

Appropriate Site: No particular site necessary; anywhere with level ground.
Terraced Seating/Amphitheatre & Stage 16

Description: Stepped seating creates an outdoor classroom and performance area.

Behavioral and Developmental Goals: Sensory stimulation; exposure to creative expression; opportunities for unique storytelling and dialogue; imaginative play; opportunities for unique storytelling and dialogue;

Materials Needed: Stones or concrete for step/wall.

Expertise Needed: Experienced landscape designer or landscape architect is needed to create appropriate structural designs appropriate for each particular site. A mason or woodworker will be needed depending materials chosen for seats.

Appropriate Site: An area will a slight incline would be ideal.
**Tree Branch Nests**

**Description:** Life-sized bird nests created out of sticks, twigs, and raw lumber.

**Behavioral and Developmental Goals:** Sensory stimulation; imaginative play

**Materials Needed:** Sticks and twigs of various lengths and diameters and raw lumber for structural support.

**Expertise Needed:** A carpenter may be needed to create a supporting structure.

**Appropriate Site:** No particular site necessary, though a wooded area may make the most impact.
Willow Huts & Tunnels

Description: Willow branches and whips are woven together to create huts and tunnels.

Behavioral and Developmental Goals: Imaginative play; physical exercise

Materials Needed: Flexible, freshly cut branches and whips of various lengths and diameters.

Expertise Needed: None in particular.

Appropriate Site: No particular site necessary.
**Water Play Area**

**Description:** Water that is pumped or naturally collected moves through channels and pools that children have a hand in building, shaping.

**Behavioral and Developmental Goals:** Imaginative play; physical exercise; educational opportunities about water processes, physics, and mechanics.

**Materials Needed:** Hand pump, rocks, sticks, access to water, and any other items that may move water.

**Expertise Needed:** None in particular.

**Appropriate Site:** Access to water is most important - either naturally gathered water from a stream or roof top, or access to a water spigot. A partially sunny area may be helpful in preventing the area from become overly muddy.
**Wooden Platforms**

**Description:** A series of elevated wooden platforms are built around the trunks of trees allowing kids to walk amongst the tree canopy. Platforms may be connected by small bridges or be independent of one another.

**Behavioral and Developmental Goals:** Physical exercise; coordination and balance; educational opportunities about water processes, physics, and mechanics

**Materials Needed:** Lumber and hardware to build platforms, bridges, ladders, steps, and railings as needed. Large, mature trees to build around.

**Expertise Needed:** A nature-buff or Arborist familiar with trees for choosing high quality appropriate trees, A carpenter or construction worker is needed to design and build structurally sound elements.

**Appropriate Site:** A wooded area with several mature trees.
Other Ideas / Possibilities

Natural swings/tire swings
Rock piles with bridge between -- circuit of rocks, logs, ropes to walk
Old stagecoach for climbing
Sandbox boat & climbing structure
Climbing on fallen tree
Hopscotch with log slices
Spider web climbing structure
Rope bridge from tree to tree
Hanging ropes with many different lengths
Balancing beams
Sitting rocks - cluster of rocks
Messy materials area (big logs, bark)
Log planters out of old trees
Natural fruit trees, blueberries, raspberries
Old log cabin
Fruit trees, raspberries, strawberries, asparagus
Bonfire areas (rock circles)

What would you like to see and do??