



Schlitz Audubon
Nature Center

A Closer Look at Outdoor Gear: A Presentation for Preschool Parents





Outdoor Gear Basics

Rainpants, rainsuits, rainboots and [waterproof rain mittens](#) are not just for rainy days! They are a part of our daily uniform.

- *Waterproof outer gear keeps children dry and comfortable during our many outdoor activities, including sand, mud and water play*
- *They provide protection when sitting on damp, cool ground*
- *They provide protection from wind and rain*
- *They provide added protection from insect bites*
- *They can reduce scrapes and scratches from plants and branches*

We typically wear this “uniform” when temperatures are between 45-70 degrees. When it grows colder, we make a few adjustments...





More Outdoor Gear Basics:

- When temperatures drop into the 40's, it's time to switch to insulated boots and to add another layer beneath your waterproof rain gear.
- For maximum warmth, children should wear mittens, not gloves. Gloves spread the fingers out, which means they get cold very quickly in cold weather. We are big fans of [water-proof mittens](#), as they can be worn alone in fall and spring, and over warmer mittens in winter. ("Water resistant" mittens, such as ski mittens, result in wet hands.)
- *Children should practice putting their mittens on themselves as this leads to greater control over their own comfort.*
- [Hand and Foot Warmers](#) are strongly recommended for cold weather!





Still More Outdoor Gear Basics:

- We love the [waterproof bags](#) that parents have started buying for preschool. These can remain outside with the children in all kinds of weather, keeping extra clothes warm and dry. (Look for “dry bags” or “dry sacks” when searching online.)
- An alternative to a dry bag is a simple jumbo Ziplock, available at most grocery stores. Simply place your child’s regular backpack or bag inside. A “chip clip” can help keep the bag closed (we have found that most children have an easier time using the clips than managing the Ziplock seals).
- Children’s outdoor bags should contain: additional layers, such as a long sleeved shirt and/or fleece pullover; a set of extra mittens; at least one extra facemask, a full change of clothes, and plenty of socks! In warmer weather, you can also pack a full water bottle. *To ensure everything makes it home again, it is really important to label everything with your child’s name!*





Waterproof or Water Resistant?

Most winter items (mittens, snow pants, and boots) are *water resistant*. They can manage soft, fluffy snow, but not deep, icy puddles or slush.

Because we are outside in cold and wet weather, being water resistant is not always enough. We need to be as waterproof as possible.

We suggest pairing *warm mittens with unlined waterproof mittens*. The layers add extra warmth and on very cold days a hand-warmer can also be added. This combination keeps hands warm and dry in a range of weather conditions and can be adapted as needed throughout the seasons.



Winter mittens provide warmth, but are not waterproof during slush and puddle season. Pairing winter mittens with unlined waterproof mittens works well.





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Game Changers

(suggested by experienced parents)



On wet, cold days, you can pair a light-weight one piece rainsuit (such as those made by [Reima](#) or [Tuffo](#)) with an insulated snow suit. This keeps a child both warm and waterproof. You will need to get the rainsuit in a larger size if you want to try this!

Electric boot and mitten warmers can quickly dry the insides of wet boots and mittens!





Five Tips for Keeping Feet Warm (in rain, snow, mud, and slush!)

1. Have your child wear their thickest socks when trying on winter boots. *You want to be sure there is enough room in the toe box.* Without adequate space for circulation, toes will get cold quickly. We generally find sizing up ½ or even a whole size in winter boots provides the added space needed in the toe box.
2. A single pair of thick wool socks inside a roomy toe box is warmer than multiple layers of socks that can hinder circulation!
3. *Avoid cotton socks in cold weather.* Cotton pulls heat away from feet, especially when it gets wet. Wool or wool-blend socks are best.
4. For additional warmth, use a stick-on toe warmer such as those made by Hot Hands. (These attach outside socks. They should never go against bare skin.)
5. Consider the tried-and-true method of wrapping socked feet inside plastic bags before putting them into boots. While we don't love plastic grocery bags, they really can help keep small feet dry in wet, sloppy weather.





Winter boots, or insulated rain boots, are needed when temperatures fall into the 40's or lower. Most temperature ratings on insulated rain boots are overly optimistic so these should be paired with warm socks and toe warmers as temperatures fall.



A roomy toe-box, wool socks (never cotton), and stick-on toe warmers go a long way in keeping little (and big) feet warm in cold weather!





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Additional Tips:

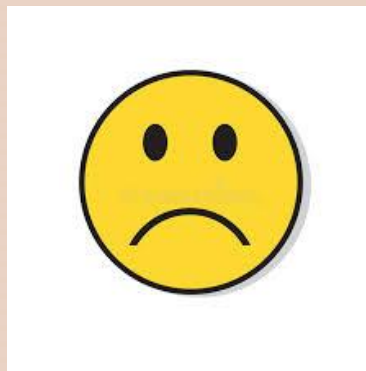


A base layer under clothes, a warm hat that covers the ears, and a neck warmer that is easily adjusted over the face will help ensure warmth in cold weather!





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Soft, fleecy mittens get wet very quickly (unless they are worn under waterproof mittens). Gloves keep fingers separated, making them cold (plus children struggle to get them on). Cotton footies don't keep feet warm, and often peel off inside boots. Cotton tights are difficult to change once wet and pull heat away from feet. Scarves come off easily.





Outdoor Gear Brands We Recommend (with commentary)

[Polarn O. Pyret](#)

This is an outstanding Swedish brand. They are expensive, but the quality is excellent. Their waterproof mittens are top of the line! Families at outdoor schools like ours can receive a 20% discount. Email them at outdoorschools@polarnopyretusa.com for details!

[Oaki](#)

A good source for durable, high quality one-piece rainsuits as well as insulated, neoprene rainboots. (Rainsuits now come in adult sizes! Unfortunately, their rainsuits do not include pockets.)

[Reima](#)

A very reasonably priced brand that makes roomy, suspender-style rain pants and secure, waterproof mittens. Their waterproof material is durable, but slightly less breathable than other brands.

A note on one-piece rain-suits: the advantage of one-piece rain suits is that you can order up a size or two, and they can be worn over winter snow suits for added protection. The disadvantage is that they make bathroom visits more challenging, and are difficult to “layer down” if a child is overly warm.





Outdoor Gear Brands We Recommend (with commentary)

[Stonz](#)

We are less familiar with this company, but they have received rave reviews from our Nature Preschool colleagues in Canada. Products include warm liners that can be added to boots for those in-between warm/cold days and winter mittens designed to fit easily over thick coat sleeves.

[Tuffo](#)

Tuffo's best seller is their one-piece muddy buddy rainsuit. It is very lightweight and can fit easily over snowsuits, making it a good waterproof layer even in the winter. Children often struggle with the duel zippers. As with all one-piece suits, these can be hard to manage if a child overheats.

[Bogs](#)

We like these insulated rain boots because they cover a wide range of weather conditions! However, their temperature ratings are not entirely accurate and in deep puddles, little feet can still get wet. In cold weather, foot warmers will be necessary! (In puddle season, plastic bags may be needed.) The Weyco Group in Glendale hosts a [warehouse sale on Bogs](#) multiple times a year.





A Note on Warm Weather:

Warm weather is generally easier to navigate at Nature Preschool. However, we are pleased to share the following tips for late summer and late spring weather:

- If temperatures are over 70 degrees, we generally remove our raingear unless it is actually raining. Otherwise, it's easy to overheat. Because the air temperature is often cooler here at Schlitz Audubon (especially if we hike to Lake Michigan), *children should still come to school with rain gear in their outdoor gear bags.*
- Sunhats, a full water bottle, and closed-toe shoes or rainboots are good warm weather accessories. (Open-toed sandals can result in woodchips inside shoes as well as small abrasions on feet.) Please have your child wear socks inside rainboots so they don't develop blisters. We hike through a lot of muddy puddles, so shoes that can get wet are important. (You may want a dry pair for your child, post-hike!)
- Warm weather can also mean ticks. Long, light-weight pants tucked into socks can help prevent ticks from crawling up. We like [picaridin insect repellents](#) because they are effective against ticks and mosquitos but do not carry strong scents. Several members of our preschool community have adverse reactions to lemon eucalyptus.





What kind of weather can we expect at Nature Preschool?



Well, it's Wisconsin. We don't have a crystal ball, but chances are we will experience sunshine, rain, fog, sleet, snow, slush, and plenty of mud! We will be outside in all but the most hazardous weather – meaning we will seek shelter when there is lightning and will come indoors to warm-up when temperatures are in the single digits. But our goal is to be outdoors as much as possible. It is really important that every child (and teacher) come dressed ready for whatever nature gives us!







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