



FOUL WEATHER FUN

by Rusty Keeler

“Well, the weather outside is frightful . . .” (in many regions during fall and winter months), but that doesn’t mean we should keep kids indoors.

Just the opposite! We want children to get outside and experience all types of weather conditions in all seasons. Quoting the famous saying, “there’s no

bad weather, just bad clothing,” folks from all over are bundling children up and sending them outside in all kinds of weather. Here’s another saying: “There’s



no bad natural play space.” How about that! Just because your yard isn’t in its lush green, summertime glory doesn’t mean it’s still not an amazing place to explore. In every natural play space there is something to discover all year long. It’s just up to us, as adults, to provide the proper clothing and say “yes!” and send children outside to play.

These pictures are from one of my favorite preschool play yards in Ithaca, New York. This time of year it certainly isn’t pretty. But does that mean it’s not fun? Does that mean it’s not worth going outside? Of course not! Some people think a natural playscape needs to be neat and trim and tidy, but I say let it be wild and crazy, messy and muddy. Nature grows in mysterious ways and so do natural playscapes (and so do kids!). It’s *fun* to have a living space that transforms through the seasons and changes year after year. And is *interesting*. And is

educational, too. With the right loose parts added to the mix, your outdoor space becomes a living classroom full of wonder, weirdness, and a thousand possibilities for play.

And that’s what’s happening here. It’s a natural playscape in the sludgy time of year for sure; but look at all the loose parts. Tool-type things such as buckets, shovels, rakes, wagons, and traffic cones help kids poke, dig, and construct things. And check out the loose natural materials: logs, branches, stumps, leaves, and rocks. Do you have some of those loose elements for children in your outdoor space? Here, our heroes are digging for dinosaur bones, shoveling dirty snow, setting up traffic cone obstacle courses, and getting wagon rides through the winter lilac tree tunnel. (One boy had me smell the bare branches telling me “you can smell the lilac flowers if you try hard enough.” I gave it a good sniff and I almost thought he was right.)

So what are your children going to do in the foul weather-time of year? Stay cooped up indoors? No way! All seasons are the perfect season to get outside and play. So maybe you load up on extra all-weather clothing so that there’s plenty for everybody. You could go to a thrift shop or ask families for hand-me-downs. Boots, rain pants, snow pants, gloves, hats. That’s really all it takes for children to get outside and experience the world.

Well, that and you saying “yes!”



Yes, Rusty Keeler designs and builds natural playscapes all over the place. But lately he’s been busy playing with his new baby boy Julian James. YEAH! Check out his website (www.earthplay.net) for more ideas, articles, and good natural play stuff.

