



## **NATURE PLAY GARDEN OPENS APRIL 1 AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO**

*Nature-themed play, pollinator plants, and the return of Bugs Alive!*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** March 16, 2022

TACOMA, Wash.—Crawl, balance, investigate and explore. The [Little Explorers Nature Play Garden](#) opens April 1 at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. The immersive nature play garden is designed to cultivate a sense of belonging and excitement for nature along with an appreciation for plants, pollinators and other small creatures. It's a playing place and a learning space.

“The Nature Play Garden will stimulate imaginations, encourage exploration and immerse kids in the world around them in a fun way,” said conservation engagement curator Wendy Spaulding. “We hope that children will leave the garden with a deeper connection with the great outdoors and the small animals and plants that live there.”

### **Nature Play Elements**

Designed for children ages 3 to 5, the garden has nature play elements that encourage curiosity and wandering discovery, like stepping stones for hopping and logs to crawl through. Kids can build and experiment at a “Builder’s Deck” with natural components like sticks, log slices and fir cones. A low balance course offers a challenge for young children to practice motor skills and provides a sense of adventure and accomplishment. Children can help build a giant nest made of branches and crawl inside, encouraging role-play.

“This garden fosters the kind of unstructured, free play recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics for healthy growth and development,” explained Spaulding. “It gives kids the freedom to make choices for play within safe boundaries.”

This type of play-based learning is also meant to inspire kids to take action to protect wildlife. One section of the garden is dedicated to multi-sensory discovery and features flowers and plants with qualities such as color, scent, and texture.

While the play elements are for the younger crowd, the garden is meant to be enjoyed by guests of all ages and abilities. The garden is filled with native and exotic plants that attract pollinators such as bees, hummingbirds and butterflies. Everyone can appreciate the garden’s beautiful, engaging landscape of shrubs, flowers, grasses, boulders, logs and places to watch tiny creatures at work.

### **Bugs Alive! is Back**

So, what's all the buzz about?

The zoo's popular Bugs Alive! program returns May 7 with a new home at the Nature Play Garden. Keepers will host live bug presentations on a stage in the garden, and people of all ages can meet bugs like a Chilean rose tarantula, Peruvian cave roach or emperor scorpion and discover the important roles bugs play in our daily lives. A large video monitor will show the audience a magnified view of the bugs during presentations.

"Some creatures may seem scary to children, and even adults, but we want to highlight the importance of these small living things," said Spaulding. "By discovering their important roles in nature and in our lives, we can learn to respect and even appreciate even the 'creepiest' bugs."

The Nature Play Garden includes an ADA accessible path and is designed for kids of varied skills and abilities. During the spring and summer months, staff and volunteers will be ready to welcome and engage guests in garden features and other hands-on activities.

"The garden is designed in a way that makes nature exploration fun for everyone," said Spaulding. "We are excited to see it spark the creative-learning instincts of every child who explores it."

Every visit to the Nature Play Garden is free with paid admission or membership to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. For more information about the play garden, go to [pdza.org](https://www.pdza.org) or <https://www.pdza.org/discover/nature-play-garden/>.

The Nature Play Garden is presented by TAPCO Credit Union and supported by Watson's Greenhouse & Nursery. The play elements are provided by grant support from TOTE Maritime.

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*Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA).*

**Media Contacts:**

Whitney DalBalcon, 253-278-6343 or [whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org](mailto:whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org)

Tessa Miller, 253-331-5858 or [tessa.miller@pdza.org](mailto:tessa.miller@pdza.org)