

PLAY COO SYSTEM

explore the nature of play

Bernheim 
ARBORETUM AND RESEARCH FOREST

Healthy communities require healthy play environments

*Play in nature helps children engage more creatively, work cooperatively, practice problem solving, learn to safely navigate risk, and experience more joy – all skills that lead to healthier children and healthier communities. **Playcosystem** is a place where children build meaningful relationships with nature playfully.*

Playcosystem isn't simply a playground; it's a ten-acre laboratory to explore the value of nature play while inspiring a new generation of high value play environments for the entire region. The strategies, structures, designs, methods, and lessons learned in the creation of **Playcosystem** are all being explored and documented to position Bernheim to assist others in the future.

Since 2010, Bernheim's *Children at Play Network* has explored strategies to connect families to nature through play that nurtures the social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills needed for children to thrive. The Children at Play Network works at the community level to ensure every child has a place in nature where they feel free, safe, healthy, empowered and joyful. In 2019 the American Public Gardens Association awarded Bernheim the prestigious *Program of Excellence Award* for our innovative and on-going work in play-based learning. **Playcosystem** provides Bernheim with a new tool to continue that exploration as we engage with our entire region to reimagine the landscapes of play.

Play is important – Research tells us outdoor play is a critically important childhood experience that supports social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Research also tells us children spend increasingly less time outdoors and fewer children have access to high quality natural spaces. These trends are correlated with increases in adverse health conditions that more outdoor free play can help remedy.

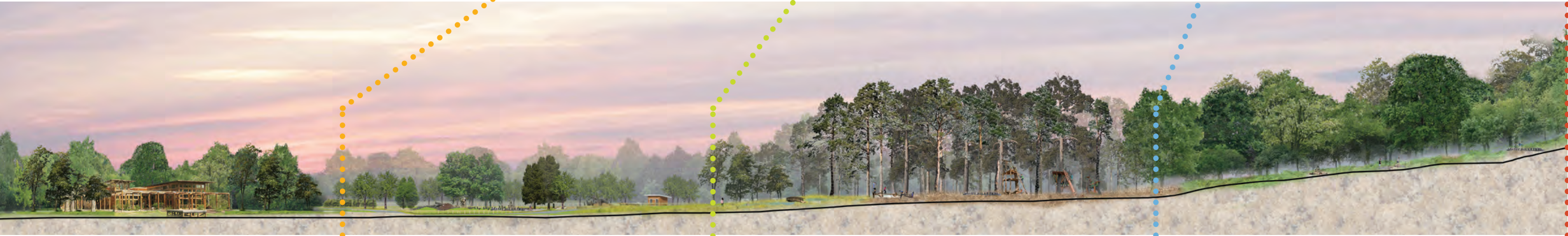
BENEFITS OF NATURE-BASED FREE PLAY	
• Improves academic performance	• Fosters creative problem solving
• Stimulates imaginations	• Boosts immune systems
• Boosts children's energy levels	• Helps with fine and gross motor development
• Reduces ADHD	• Helps children navigate risk appropriately
• Improves mental health	• Improves vision



What is Playcosystem?

Playcosystem will be built on ten acres of land adjacent to Bernheim’s current Visitor Center. It will include three distinct play zones, each with a different feel and play focus tuned to the landscape. The diversity of play options will allow every child to gravitate to their favorite area of play.

The varying play options also create a diversity of sharable models that can be adapted or adopted by childcare centers, schools, parks and non-profits. **Playcosystem** is as much about how to support playgrounds regionally as it is about creating a valuable new destination for members and visitors to explore at Bernheim.



VISITOR CENTER Nature-based programs for groups and families	NATURE PLAY The basics of play in nature	ADVENTURE PLAY Active and constructive play	EXPLORATION PLAY Child directed exploration in the woods
PLAY ZONE: Nature Programs PLAY TYPE: Directed programs and activities AGE FOCUS GROUP: All ages	PLAY ZONE: Nature Playground PLAY TYPE: Free play in nature AGE FOCUS GROUP: Infants to young children	PLAY ZONE: TreeCess PLAY TYPE: Active and constructive AGE FOCUS GROUP: Elementary and older	PLAY ZONE: Adventure Forest PLAY TYPE: Exploration and discovery AGE FOCUS GROUP: Elementary and older
  	  	  	 

*What distinguishes
Playcosystem from
other nature play
landscapes?*



1. Children can play WITH nature – not simply IN nature

Children are part of the design process. It's a play environment created by and for children to engage with nature. Loose parts – objects children can move around to create things – are an emphasis of the design. Nearly half of Playcosystem is a wooded area where children can run free to explore, create, and engage with nature as deep as their imaginations will take them.

2. Playcosystem is a LABORATORY for the study of play

Bernheim's Children at Play Network is an established leader in play with more than 100 partner organizations regionally and has a national reputation. Part of the Playcosystem focus includes partnerships with universities and play researchers to investigate the value of play. Sharing knowledge will benefit more than just Bernheim.

3. Positioning Bernheim to support others

Bernheim's Children at Play Network already provides state approved training workshops for licensed childcare professionals. We already assist others in planning new nature based playgrounds. Playcosystem adds a valuable new tool that will help us extend that work by creating a menu of play options that will continually improve over time based on research and experience.

NOT ALL PLAY IS EQUAL

Play is a little word with complex implications. There are many types of play and not all of them are as valuable in supporting child development. Most children engage in play that is directed either by people or the play equipment itself. Playcosystem is based on research about play to model best practices. It includes loose parts and play strategies to give children more autonomy over the details of how they play. Playcosystem creates an environment that supports child-directed play in nature.



We need your help....

Support for **Playcosystem** allows Bernheim to provide a unique new play landscape at Bernheim. It also allows us to address the growing demand for the Children at Play Network to collaborate with others in addressing their play aspirations.



Here is where your support can be applied:

GENERAL SUPPORT

A great deal goes into creating any play landscape. When you add in the aspirations of making **Playcosystem** a laboratory for studying play and inspiring new play environments throughout the region, things get complex. General support helps Bernheim’s Children at Play Network continue our work to be a resource for the entire region and beyond.

FIRST PHASE CONSTRUCTION

Funds for the first phase of **Playcosystem** are focused on some of the key hardscaping and play strategies across the entire ten-acre site. Think of it as a first generation of play that will be carefully developed to reveal important information about next steps. **Playcosystem** grows and changes as we learn more about the people we serve.

LOOSE PARTS LIBRARY

What differentiates **Playcosystem** from most other playgrounds is how we provide children with opportunities to build, create, change, and adapt their play environment. Loose parts are all the things we give children to play with – not just on. The Loose Parts Library is a storage system where those items are kept organized so children can receive or borrow what they need to accomplish their play ideas. Parents and teachers can receive information on how to support children in play.

PLAYER IN RESIDENCE

Bernheim is already a destination for visiting artists and research scientists. The Player in Residence program will allow Bernheim to invite play professionals from around the world on a regular basis so that we can learn from each other and share evolving ideas, perspectives, and explorations.

BIENNIAL PLAY CONFERENCE

Playcosystem is a place of discovery for children but also for the people that create play environments. Every other year we will gather play professionals from around the world to share knowledge about the science behind play. The conference experience will also be available virtually.



SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE

Playcosystem is a destination playground for the entire family. Our hope is that families will choose to spend hours there each visit and come back often. Incorporated into the design are picnic facilities, water fountains, restrooms access, and other comforts that make **Playcosystem** an easy choice for families.

SECOND PHASE CONSTRUCTION

Playcosystem is a proving ground that embraces constant change, incremental improvement, and continuous innovation. That’s the work of a laboratory for play. As we discover what works and what doesn’t, we not only improve **Playcosystem**, we also improve our ability to help others. The second phase tests new ideas and objects – illuminating the values and theories of play in childhood development and family dynamics.

PLAY FACILITATORS AND PLAY RESEARCH

Playcosystem intends to change perceptions about what a playground is and how play best supports child development. Play Facilitators are the people that make that happen. Play research helps us discover new information about the science behind play. Bernheim is developing a relationship with the University of Louisville Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education to establish **Playcosystem** as a field research station in play-based learning and health.



*Are you able to help Bernheim
lead our communities
toward a healthier and more
playful future?*

For more information about any aspect of **Playcosystem**, please contact:

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*To nurture a next generation of people
that will grow up to love and protect nature,
we should put our best efforts behind
natural playgrounds that bring freedom,
joy and adventure.*



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