

2018-2019 Berks Nature Preschool Family Handbook



**Message from the Berks
Nature Preschool Staff:**

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We believe that nature is essential to our quality of life. Thank you for sharing that value with your children and for choosing the Berks Nature Preschool for your child's academic experience! We would like to officially welcome you and your child to the first year of our nature preschool program. We plan to build upon the very successful summer camp preschool program that has engaged many children and their families for over five years. We have a very exciting year planned that is packed with engaging, fun and educational adventures. We have created this handbook to provide you with information you should need regarding your child's upcoming nature preschool experience. Please read over all of the enclosed information about the nature preschool policies and procedures. Feel free to contact us at 610-372-4992 x 100 with any questions you may have or if you need further assistance. We look forward to meeting you and your child at one of our nature preschool open house sessions!

As our plans for the Nature Preschool grow, we will be expanding and updating this family handbook. Please check the footer to be sure you have the most recent edition.

Should you need to contact us please do so at the Berks Nature offices (610-372-4992) until school begins. Our Angelica phone number (610-896-4600) is not monitored on a regular basis.

Sincerely,
The Berks Nature Preschool Staff

Berks Nature's Mission

Berks Nature is the leading agent for the conservation of the environment in Berks County.

We believe that nature is essential to our quality of life.

We demonstrate that through Conservation, Protection, Partnerships, Leadership, Relationships and Education

WHAT do we do?

- Land Conservation programs
- Watershed restoration programs
- Trails creation and maintenance
- Environmental Education
- Eco Camps
- State of the Environment reporting
- Urban gardens
- Programs for municipal leaders
- Newsletters, e-news, communications
- Advocacy of projects that enhance our mission
- Programs that Connect people with nature

Berks Nature offers its services and admissions without regard to race, color, religious creed, ancestry, sex, handicap, age and national origin.

Mission of the Berks Nature Preschool

The mission of the Berks Nature Preschool is to provide a high quality early childhood education that meets the children's developmental needs, while instilling a lasting appreciation for and meaningful relationship with the natural world. The Berks Nature Preschool will empower children by offering those opportunities to explore, create, imagine, learn, and grow through hands-on nature-based activities and experiences. We will promote social, emotional, self-help, and cognitive skills as well as encourage a lifelong love, respect, and understanding of nature.



Philosophy of the Berks Nature Preschool



Berks Nature believes that nature is essential to our quality of life. Children are born naturalists and are intrinsically motivated to learn. The Berks Nature Preschool builds on children's inherent curiosity about the world by using hands-on, nature-based activities to foster social, emotional, physical, and academic skill development. The 90-acre outdoor environment at Angelica Park serves as a natural venue for encouraging children to explore the world with all of their senses, experiment in the environment, and communicate their discoveries to those around them. Our preschool teachers promote learning by:

- Providing an environment that encourages discovery, experimentation, and the opportunity to see the results of one's actions.
- Developing activities that encourage growth based on children's abilities and interests.
- Encouraging problem-solving and reflection by asking open-ended questions and providing information in response to children's ideas, insights, and concerns.
- Assisting children in their interactions with each other and offering opportunities for conflict resolution and cooperative learning.
- Appreciating the individuality of children and families, and celebrating diversity.
- Engaging the whole family in the nature-based educational process.

Curriculum for the Berks Nature Preschool

The Berks Nature Preschool will use the Reggio-Emilia inspired emergent curriculum as a holistic approach to learning that addresses the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive needs of the child. This approach provides growth and development of the whole child through active learning experiences constructed by the children, adults, and surrounding environment. It encourages the development for an appreciation and wonder of the natural world that helps the children make discoveries and create connections through experiencing their environment on their own terms and at their own pace.



The Nature Place has an outdoor nature play area on site, which will provide children with the opportunity to enjoy free play and discovery in a safe and defined natural setting of Angelica Park. In addition, we have a teaching garden on our park campus so children can engage in sustainable agriculture, composting, and the art of growing healthy food.

“I can’t say enough good things about the program...the teachers are wonderful, activities are well thought out, and both enjoyable and great for the mind and body.” ~ Camper parent

Preschool Licensure

Preschools in Pennsylvania are licensed through the PA Department of Health and Human Services. The regulations for licensure can be found at:

<http://www.pacode.com/secure/data/055/chapter3270/chap3270toc.html>

We are seeking licensure but do not have it at this time. We do not anticipate problems with achieving licensure by fall 2018; however, we will keep you posted during the process. In addition to meeting and exceeding the State regulations, we will strive to provide expert faculty and staff in a safe, secure, respectful, and welcoming setting to encourage the best learning opportunities available for your child. To assist us with this mission, Berks Nature has created a “Preschool Advisory Committee” compiled of education faculty from area colleges and universities, as well as preschool providers to advise us on the creation of the best nature preschool possible.

Berks Nature is a non-profit organization. We are proud members of:

- *ERAFN (Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools)*
- *ANCA (Association of Nature Center Administrators)*
- *PALTA (Pennsylvania Land Trust Association)*
- *PAEE (Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Education)*
- *LTA (Land Trust Alliance)*

School Year Dates

The school year begins the Wednesday after Labor Day (September 5, 2018) and ends the Friday of Memorial Day weekend in May (May 24, 2019).

Staff Leadership

Our staff leadership is a carefully selected and well-trained group of women and men. All staff members have been chosen for their experience, special talents, creativity, and sensitivity. They have been thoroughly screened through a complete background, and criminal history check.

The Nature Preschool Director provides the primary leadership, along with the President of Berks Nature, for the nature preschool program. The director is a working professional who has had extensive experience in formal and/or informal education. She/he is responsible for the health, safety and engagement of the children and the nature preschool employees through the safe operation of the Berks Nature Preschool.

The nature preschool teachers and assistants are professionals who are responsible for the development and delivery of the nature preschool curriculum that is safe, fun and age-appropriate. The activities reflect the nature preschool's commitment to stewardship of the natural environment. The teacher to student ratio is no more than 1:10.

Parent-Staff Communication

We are interested in hearing your suggestions and appreciate your calls! Please let us know of any questions, suggestions and difficulties so we can provide you and your child with a successful nature preschool experience. You can contact the Berks Nature Preschool directly during school hours at 610-372-4992 x 115 or call Berks Nature at 610-372-4992 x 100.

We will provide you with the cell phone number for the Nature Preschool Director when you register in case you need to get in touch with the staff during school hours.

Hours of Operation

Regular nature preschool hours

Full Day - 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

AM only – 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

PM only – 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Drop off for full day and morning school hours is between 8:45-9:00 AM.

Pick up for morning only school hours is 12:00 PM – 12:15 PM

Drop off for afternoon only school hours is 12:45 PM – 1:00 PM

Pick up for afternoon and full school hours is between 4:00-4:15 PM.

Late pick-up charges

Pick-up after 4:15 PM for families that have not registered for the extended care program or for children in the morning only program who pick up after 12:15 PM will result in a \$5.00 late charge for every 15-minute increment. If you feel you will need extended care, we recommend you register for it in advance so that we may plan accordingly and guarantee that a staff person will be available to cover the extended care time period that is requested.

Extended Care / Pre-Post School

We are pleased to offer extended care hours to fit caregivers' work schedules. Additional daycare hours are available from 7:00 to 9:00 AM, noon to 1:00 PM, and 4:00 to 6:00 PM. Students must provide a lunch from home when using the lunch hour. (Lunch hour is included in tuition for those students spending a full day with us.)

Prescheduled care is an additional cost of \$10.00 per hour. Drop-in care is available at a cost of \$12.50 per hour.

Pre-scheduled daycare is daycare that has been scheduled through the office and paid for one month in advance, as part of the tuition payment. Drop-in daycare must also be scheduled through the office and paid for at the time of service. Arrangements will be made for drop-in care after staff and child ratios are considered.

Holidays

Our Nature Preschool observes the following holidays and will be closed accordingly:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Presidents' Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Columbus Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Day after Thanksgiving
- Day before Christmas through New Year's Day

School Closings and Weather Delays

In the event of severe weather conditions that prevent the opening of Berks Nature Preschool please check the local news station 69 WFMZ for school closings and delays. Berks Nature Preschool will post closings or delays no later than 6am on the morning of the severe weather. We will also post closings and delays on our website and email all families. In the event that severe weather conditions make it necessary for Berks Nature Preschool to close early, parents will be notified by the staff. It is essential to ensure your child's emergency contact information is always up to date for events such as this.

Drop-Off & Pick-Up Procedures

****Please check your child's cubby daily for important information and items to bring home****

Regular School Hours

When dropping off or picking up your child during drop off and pick up hours, please proceed to the entrance to the Angelica Park parking lot (see map on p.14). A nature preschool staff person will be there to greet you and will escort your child to and from the car. Upon registration you will be mailed two family name signs to keep in the car. The signs can be placed on the dashboard with the child's name prominently displayed in the window. This will help the preschool staff to expedite the dismissal process and create an atmosphere where every staff member gets to know each child and his/her family members. Additional signs can be obtained upon request.

Extended Preschool Hours

Before and after care activities will take place in and around The Nature Place at Angelica Park, the **home base** for the Berks Nature Preschool.

When dropping off and/or picking up your child during these times (7:30-8:45 AM and 4:15-5:30PM), please park in the Angelica Park parking lot and proceed to the Berks Nature Preschool. A nature preschool staff person will be present to assist you with the sign-in/sign-out process. Please bring a photo ID with you to help us ensure the safety of all the children during the dismissal process.

Lunch

Children bring their lunches and lunch drinks every day, which will be stored in an air-conditioned location. Limited refrigeration is available; children can bring their lunch in an insulated lunch box. Please do not pack any items that need to be microwaved. We do have limited access to a microwave in the case of special situations. Water bottles can be refilled at The Nature Place.

Snacks

A healthy school snack is provided every morning and afternoon to all children.

Allergies

Prior to enrollment, a Child Health Assessment form must be completed and signed by the child's health care provider and parent/guardian. Any known allergies must be noted along with an allergy action plan from your pediatrician. These must be documented allergies as noted by your physician. This form must be updated regularly. Written instruction including the food or items which the child is allergic and steps that need to be taken to avoid that food or item.

Nap Time

Children are required to rest after lunch for 1 hour per day. Each child will be assigned their own rest mat provided by Berks Nature Preschool. Please provide a crib sized sheet and blanket labeled with your child's name. Children may bring ONE SMALL stuffed animal for rest if needed. Children are not required to sleep. Those children who do not sleep will rest or read books.

What to Bring to School:

The emergent curriculum encourages children to explore and discover, which can be messy. For this reason, it is important that children come dressed for messy, outside play. Clothing that can be covered in mud, paint, and other materials is a must every day. When your child comes home dirty from exploring, we have done our job 😊. Children will also need comfortable, closed-toed, protective shoes with gripping soles for running, jumping, and climbing. If your child does not come to school in appropriate outdoor clothing and shoes, you will be called and asked to bring in appropriate clothing for your child.

Layers of clothing for changing weather and moving from outdoors to indoors are needed for children to enjoy the variety of activities offered throughout the day. You should expect your child to go outside every day. The only exceptions will be thunderstorms or extreme wind chills and/or temperatures. Clothing needs for each season include:

| FALL | WINTER | SPRING |
|---|---|---|
| Jacket or sweatshirt Rain jacket w/ hood Rain pants Rubber boots Water shoes (early fall) | Winter coat Snow pants Snow boots Hat Waterproof mittens Wool/fleece socks | Snow boots (early spring) Rubber boots (later spring) Winter coat (early spring) Jacket or sweatshirt (late spring) Rain jacket w/ hood Rain pants |

Along with the clothing items noted above, please have your child bring the following additional items to school:

- **PLEASE CLEARLY MARK YOUR CHILD’S NAME ON ALL ITEMS THAT HE OR SHE BRINGS TO SCHOOL**
- Backpack with your child’s name on it.
- Lunch with a drink kept in an insulated lunch box.
- A water bottle (very important).
- Sunscreen.

- Spare set of clothes based on the season is required and will be kept at the preschool in case your child should need to change into a fresh set of clothing.
- A “ready to have lots of fun” attitude

Please do not bring the following items to school:

We would appreciate it if children would please leave the following items at home:

- Money (except for designated days)
- iPods and other electronic devices
- Trading cards, stuffed animals, or any other toys

The Berks Nature Preschool is not responsible for any items that are misplaced, damaged, and/or stolen. We do have a lost and found box.

Registration

To register your child for the Berks Nature Preschool, you will need to complete a registration form for each child and submit them with a \$100 non-refundable registration fee per child before the start of school. We are asking parents to complete the registration form as soon as possible so you can insure your child's space in nature preschool. The additional medical forms etc. can be completed later in the summer.

Tuition Payment Schedule

First month Tuition is due July 1, 2018 and then again September 1 with subsequent payments due on the first of each month. Tuition can be paid monthly or in one lump sum.

Sample Tuition Options

| Days per week | Per child monthly cost | Annual – 9 months |
|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 5x/week full day | \$1,120.00 | \$10,080.00 |
| 3x/week full day | \$861.00 | \$7,749.00 |
| 2x/week full day | \$574.00 | \$5,166.00 |
| 5 day a.m. with 3x/week p.m. | \$972.00 | \$8,748.00 |
| 5 day a.m. with 2x/week p.m. | \$828.00 | \$7,452.00 |
| 5x/week a.m. | \$540.00 | \$4,860.00 |
| 3x/week a.m. | \$450.00 | \$4,050.00 |
| 2x/week a.m. | \$300.00 | \$2,700.00 |
| 5x/week a.m. | \$480.00 | \$4,320.00 |
| 3x/week a.m. | \$324.00 | \$2,916.00 |
| 2x/week a.m. | \$216.00 | \$1,944.00 |
| 1-time registration fee | \$100.00 | |

Refunds

No refunds will be made for late arrivals or early departures.

Cancellations

If you choose to withdraw your child, a one month's written notice is required. If withdrawal is made any time after the first of the month, full payment for the month is required. The \$100 enrollment fee that was paid at the time of enrollment is non-refundable.

Nature Preschool Sick Policy

When your child starts school, you need to plan for sick days. We realize that these unpredictable sick days make life complicated for parents. The best approach is to be prepared and create an alternative care plan at the beginning of the year.

If your child is sick, please keep him/her home for their own sake and for the sake of the other preschoolers and staff members. In the event that your child becomes ill during school, we will contact the parent/guardian listed on the HEALTH/PERMISSION FORM followed by those listed as emergency contacts. In the event that your child becomes ill during the school day he or she must be picked up within 1 hour of contact in order to reduce the risk of contagion. Berks Nature Preschool reserves the right to temporarily deny any child admittance to the school for reasons of obvious illness.

Children are required to stay home if they have any of the following illnesses:

- **Fever:** Children will be sent home if their temperature is 100.0 or higher and must stay home the next day for observation. Children must be free of fever at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication. The same policy applies if your child develops a fever at home.
- **Rash:** Children will be sent home to receive an evaluation and diagnosis from their doctor. They may return to school based on a written doctor's evaluation stating that the rash is not contagious.
- **Conjunctivitis (pink-eye):** Children will be sent home if they appear to have pink-eye. They may return to school based on a written doctor's evaluation stating that the child is not contagious. If the diagnosis is BACTERIAL CONJUNCTIVITIS children must have received at least 24 hours of treatment.
- **Diarrhea:** Children will be sent home if they have more than two loose bowel movements in a particular day. Before returning to school children must be free from diarrhea for at least 24 hours.
- **Vomiting:** Children will be sent home if they vomit and must stay home the following day for observation. Before returning to school children must be symptom free for at least 24 hours.
- **Thick white, green or yellow discharge:** This often indicates an infection. Children may return to school based on a written doctor's evaluation and diagnosis. If they do not have an infection they may return to school (with a doctor's note). If they do have an infection they need at least 24 hours of treatment along with a doctor's note to return. Most doctors suggest that once on medication for 24 hours the infection is no longer contagious.

*Berks Nature Preschool children will be spending a large portion of their days outside. We ask that parents use their own judgement when sending their children back to school. Make sure your child will feel up to participating comfortably in our usual program activities, including all outdoor time.

Medications from Home

Medication that needs to be administered to a child should:

- Be brought directly to the Nature Preschool Director by the parent or caregiver in the original medicine container and with specific directions for dispensing the medication
- Be accompanied by a written note containing permission for the preschool staff to administer the medication, dosage

information, time, and dates to be given to the child, parent's name, phone number, and physician's name and phone number for reference.

Emergency Information

In the event of an emergency, every effort will be made to reach you or other contacts on your child's registration form. If we are unable to reach any of the persons listed, we will take the necessary actions for the health of your child. Should there be any changes in the emergency contact information, please notify Berks Nature in writing so that we may update your child's file.

Rainy / Cold Days

School will be held rain, shine, and on cold winter days. The Nature Place is heated/air-conditioned, which will provide us with enough indoor space to keep the students engaged, happy, and comfortable.

Absences

If your child will not be attending school on a specific day due to illness or for other reasons, please contact the preschool at 610-898-4600. If you get the voicemail system, please leave a message and one of our staff members will make sure the Nature Preschool Director receives the message.

Communication

Conferences will be scheduled in the fall and spring for every Berks Nature Preschool child. Monthly Newsletters/Calendars will be sent home informing parents/guardians of the upcoming month's activities. The preschool will also display and update the calendar on a daily basis.

Parent Visiting Days

You are always welcome to visit the Berks Nature Preschool! Please give the Nature Preschool Director a call at 610-898-4600 or on his/her cell phone (*number to be provided at start of school*) upon your arrival so that we can meet you and point you in the right direction of where your child is located at that time.

Field Trip Policy

It is important to make our outings as safe as possible while also allowing children to learn in a variety of settings. Berks Nature Preschool has created a list of procedures and practices to ensure our off-site outings are safe and enjoyable.

Procedures and Practices:

- Berks Nature Preschool Director will notify parents of all upcoming field trips requiring transportation one month in advance.
- Parents will sign a permission slip agreeing with the details of the field trip including added fees.
- A first aid kit along with all emergency contact information for all children will be taken.
- A First Aid and CPR certified staff member will accompany the children for the duration of the trip.
- Additional staffing will be provided for adequate supervision when necessary.
- Children will be counted numerous times throughout the trip to ensure the group stays together and everyone is continuously accounted for.
- Children will wear name tags with Berks Nature information including name and phone number.

Preschool Rules & Discipline Policy

Preschool is the perfect environment to promote social skills and self-esteem in children. To achieve this, we include age specific groups and activities, low teacher-student ratios, positive reinforcement, group and individual decision-making, and attention to the individual needs of each child. You are your child's own best advocate and so we encourage you to share any special information about your child that you feel will help ensure that he or she has a successful school experience.

All students are expected to follow basic rules of behavior. These rules will be explained at the beginning of each school year and reviewed regularly. The Nature Preschool Director and teachers will be constantly supervising students over the course of the day.

School Rules:

1. All students must be with a nature preschool staff member at all times.
2. Students should be respectful of self, peers, and nature preschool staff at all times.
3. Play safely and fairly (no fighting or threatening behavior will be tolerated).

Discipline Policy

We believe children learn self-control when adults treat them with dignity and use discipline techniques such as the following:

1. Guiding children by setting clear consistent limits for group behavior.
2. Visualizing mistakes as learning opportunities.
3. Redirecting children to a more acceptable behavior or activity.
4. Listening when children talk about their feelings and frustrations.
5. Guiding children to resolve conflicts and modeling skills that help them solve their own problems.
6. Patiently reminding children of the rules and their rationale as needed.

If rules are broken at school, nature preschool staff will ask the student to identify the rule that was broken and will be given a verbal warning. If the rule is broken a second time, the nature preschool staff will supervise a 30-second to 5-minute "break" near the activity. The next step will be to see the Nature Preschool Director. Parents are called when physical contact or repeat infractions are involved.

Special Needs

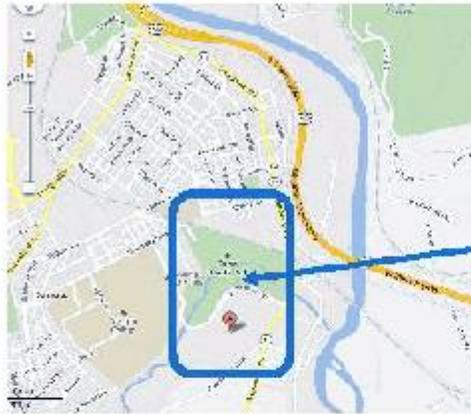
We strive to meet the needs of all children. In order for us to be able to help your child have an enjoyable experience at preschool, we ask that you notify us of your child's special needs prior to your child's first day of school. This may include information on allergies, accessibility concerns, behavioral, psychological or emotional conditions or other special needs. While we offer our school to as wide a range of children as possible, it is not possible for us to offer one-on-one care. Students requiring more attention than the prescribed teacher-to-student ratio provides (1:10) must be accompanied by a parent-provided Therapeutic Staff Support at all times at school. If your child has special issues or requires a TSS, please contact Berks Nature at 610-372-4992 to provide additional information to help us meet your child's individual needs.

Using the Bathroom

All students need to be fully potty trained and able to use the bathroom independently to attend the Berks Nature Preschool. We understand accidents occur with preschool children. The extra set of clothing you provide will be used if an accident does occur.

Thank you! We look forward to a Safe, Fun-Filled and Educational Preschool Experience!

Angelica Park Map with Pick up & Drop off Directions



Convenient Drop Off & Pick Up at Angelica Park Parking Lot "Traffic Loop". Pull into lot off of St. Bernardine Street, students will be met by teachers and walked to the school. Parents can continue to end of lot and exit.





Nature, essential to our quality of life...



Directions to The Nature Place

575 Saint Bernardine Street; Reading, PA 19607 (at Angelica Park)

GPS Coordinates: Lat/Long 40.3111367,-75.9263622222222

Local Directions (via Routes 422, 222 and 61):

From the North (Schuylkill County, Lehigh Valley): Follow Routes 61 or 222 South to Reading/Lancaster until you reach Rt. 422 East. Follow Rt. 422 East (toward Pottstown) until you reach the BUS 222 (Lancaster Ave) exit—this will be a left lane exit. At the bottom of the ramp, make a right onto Lancaster Ave. *Continued below

From the West (Lebanon): Follow Rt. 422 East to Reading until you reach the BUS 222 (Lancaster Ave) exit—this will be a left lane exit. At the bottom of the ramp, make a right onto Lancaster Ave. *Continued below

From the East (Pottstown, Norristown): Follow Rt. 422 West to Reading until you reach the BUS 222 (Lancaster Ave) exit—this will be a left lane exit. At the bottom of the ramp, make a left onto Lancaster Ave. *Continued below

From the South (Lancaster): Follow Rt. 222 North to Reading. Take Rt. 422 East towards Pottstown until you reach the BUS 222 (Lancaster Ave) exit—this will be a left lane exit. At the bottom of the ramp, make a right onto Lancaster Ave. *Continued below

Regional Directions:

From the East (via Philadelphia and the PA Turnpike):

Follow Rt. 76 West (Schuylkill Expressway) toward Valley Forge and enter the PA Turnpike (also Rt. 76 West). Continue West on the Turnpike toward Harrisburg for approximately 28 miles. Take Exit 298 (Morgantown/Reading) and then proceed on I-176 North toward Reading for approximately 8 miles. Take Exit 7 (Green Hills/Rt. 10) and turn left onto Rt. 10 toward Reading. Follow Rt. 10 North for 4.5 miles and make a left onto Saint Bernardine Street. Entrance is marked for Alvernia University – you will be entering Angelica Creek Park. You will see The Nature Place on your right, continue driving past The Nature Place to the parking lot on the right. Park and follow the Angelica Creek Trail a short distance by foot to The Nature Place.

From the West (via Harrisburg and the PA Turnpike):

Follow the PA Turnpike East toward Reading and take Exit 286 (Lancaster/Reading). Then take Rt. 222 North toward Reading and follow for approximately 11 miles. Take Rt. 422 East toward Pottstown until you reach the BUS 222 (Lancaster Ave) exit—this will be a left lane exit. At the bottom of the ramp, make a right onto Lancaster Ave. *Continued below

***from Lancaster Avenue:** make an immediate left onto Rt. 10 (Morgantown Rd). You will see the Queen City Diner at the intersection. Proceed for 1.2 miles and make a right onto Saint Bernardine Street. The entrance is marked for Alvernia University – you will be entering Angelica Creek Park. You will see The Nature Place on your right, continue driving past The Nature Place to the parking lot on the right. Park and follow the Angelica Creek Trail a short distance by foot to The Nature Place.

There is no public vehicle access directly to The Nature Place building. If you have accessibility concerns please call us in advance of your visit and we'll be sure to accommodate you. The parking lot and trail comply with ADA Standards.

We look forward to your visit! Please call 610-372-4992 with questions.



Berks Nature is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit, charitable organization. A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-752-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.