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AAA Horizons is the official monthly publication and website for AAA Southern New England members in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Hampshire.

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Get back outdoors after long winter at the Hitchcock Center in Amherst, Mass.

By Julia Quinn-Szcesuil



Jessica Schultz/Hitchcock Center
A preschooler plays at the Hitchcock Center.

Staff members at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment in Amherst want visitors to enjoy each of New England's seasons, but they know there is something especially delightful about venturing outside in early spring. Even if you love the snow and cold, new green shoots poking through the ground are magical.

The Hitchcock Center offers events for which you can register and trails to explore to increase your knowledge or feed your fascination with all things in nature. "We develop our whole program around getting children and adults outdoors and connected with their local environment," said Colleen Kelly, education director at Hitchcock. The center's location in the Larch Hill Conservation Area offers 20 acres to explore with miles of trails that wind through all types of habitats. There is also a wheelchair-accessible 1,000-foot path. The land abuts a nearby farm, once an operating dairy farm, so visitors can catch a glimpse of the goats, horses or chickens living there.

Even if you aren't typically confident enough to wander in the woods, Hitchcock's trails are clearly marked on available maps and are cleared and open. In warmer months, enjoy the perennial garden or the butterfly garden.

Founded more than 50 years ago by Ethel Dubois, the Hitchcock Center for the Environment has stayed true to its goal of connecting people with nature. Being outdoors is good for both physical and mental health, said Kelly, and adults and children don't get enough of it. "We want kids outdoors playing like they used to do," she said. Adults who have lost the contact and connection with the wonder of the outdoors are thrilled to learn about birds or animal adaptations.

Tuesday through Friday, the center's small building, once a carriage house, is staffed with volunteers and you can look around at the resource library or even visit a couple of the animals there. The grounds are open daily and the building is open on weekends if there is a program running. Check the website to register for upcoming weekend programs, which can range from birding groups and classes to a film series or a slideshow presentation.

Hitchcock Center for the Environment, 525 South Pleasant St., Amherst: 413-256-6006, www.hitchcockcenter.org. To read more about more nature and wildlife centers, click [here](#).

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