



**President's Award | Commercial Design**

The Morton Arboretum Children's Garden  
Lisle, Illinois

Landscape Architect:  
*Hitchcock Design Group*  
*EDAW*  
Client:  
*The Morton Arboretum*

Architect:  
*David Woodhouse Architects*  
Construction Managers:  
*Featherstone, Inc.,*  
*Handscomb, Faithful & Gould*

Engineers:  
*Christopher Burke Engineering,*  
*Fountain Technologies, Ltd.,*  
*McCluskey Engineering,*  
*Halloran & Yauch*



# A Whimsical Wonder

Whimsy and wonder: These two words define the design concept for this learning garden that engages children (and adults) in enlightening and playful interaction with nature. Embracing the Morton Arboretum's mission to spark curiosity and deepen learning about trees, the four-acre garden transforms educational messages into dynamic, functioning site features. The design intent was to facilitate interaction on various levels—touching, feeling, observing, experimenting and immersion in the subject. Beyond learning plant facts and ecology, children simply play with plants. Two experience levels greet visitors. Backyard Discovery Gardens, targeting kids ages two to six, offers self-guided tours and hands-on tasks against a backdrop of picket fences, tool sheds, dogwood shrubs and showy perennials. The naturalistic Adventure Woods lets children ages six to twelve choose their own experience among such safe challenges as elevated tree houses and suspended bridges.

On a blank-slate site with two groves of mature trees, the landscape architects arranged paving, stairs and dry-stack and veneered walls of colorful Wisconsin Chilton stone. Stained, stamped and textured concrete add a layer of metaphor and ornament. A showcase of 400 species of trees, shrubs, groundcovers and aquatic plants shapes the spaces, adding barriers and shade and inviting children to touch and learn.

Left: The Bloom, Zoom & Sprout Garden also features a playful Acorn Climber with oak-leaf safety surfacing.

Below: Much of Adventure Woods is about imaginative play. Treehouses and suspension bridges allow for immersion in the grove of larches, rebuds and buckeyes, providing the opportunity to see nature from a different perspective.

