

inside & out

## Come out: Summer's waiting

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*The Denver Post*

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Miles Gioia, 3, rides his scooter at Stapleton's Central Park. Other attractions include a sensory sound garden. (Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

Kids scale them. Parents covet them. Pop songs romanticize them.

Playgrounds abound in and around Denver. Many of them incorporate whimsical public art works and state-of-the-art equipment.

But it takes more than just those frills to make a great playground. It takes plenty of trees and shade and a little something intangible — a sense of community.

Great playgrounds engage kids' bodies and minds — often with an imaginative theme — and keep them coming back. The very best have these things and then that something. Maybe it's a panoramic mountain view or other nearby amenities such as a petting zoo, water park, skate park and sports fields.

With school out and kids looking for places to while away their summer, here are 11 Front Range playgrounds that consistently get high marks.

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### 1. Spring Canyon Community Park

2626 W. Horsetooth Road, Fort Collins

One hundred acres nestled in an idyllic foothills setting are punctuated by Inspiration Playground, which was designed to be universally accessible. It has a play surface that allows for wheelchairs, walkers and support braces, along with sensory-rich structures that encourage interaction between kids with and without disabilities.

### 2. Fossil Creek Community Park

5821 S. Lemay Ave., Fort Collins

Learning and play converge on this fossil-themed playground that includes a giant woolly mammoth, a prehistoric climbing wall, Ice Age water feature, Tar Pits Play Area and Adventure Island.

### 3. Scott Carpenter Park

30th Street and Arapahoe Road, Boulder

The rocket-shaped jungle gym and echo chamber set the playground apart at this park named after one of Boulder's native sons, NASA astronaut Scott Carpenter. Kids love the space-themed equipment. Parents love the park's Flatirons backdrop and easy access to the Boulder County bike path system.

### 4. Louisville Community Park

955 Bella Vista Drive, Louisville

This community deems itself "a crossroads of historical influences," and that idea framed the 2006 renovation of this municipal epicenter. In addition to improved fields, parking and picnic areas, the playground reflects the town's mining and railroad history. There's a sculpted concrete climbing structure that resembles a mineshaft, the Argo, which looks like a wavy slide but is really a rocking tube, and a big spinning bowl.

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Maddie Ganger, 12, top, swings with trainer Pam Oliver as they get a little fresh air during a workout at Westlands Park in Greenwood Village. (Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

### 5. Northglenn Sensory Park

Inside E.B. Raines Jr. Park, near the intersection of 120th Avenue and I-25, Northglenn

The name says it all at this playground where designers aspired to fuse functional art with stimulating sounds, scents and textures. The result includes sound panels and etched boulders around the equipment, stainless-steel "drum" stools, and a water play area, all of which is intended to lure kids of various ages and abilities into romping around together in the same space.

### 6. Aviation Park

1890 Teller St., Lakewood

Located on the historic site of the colorful

Broadmoor Country Club and later the Aviation Country Club, this quiet neighborhood gem benefits from mature trees for shade plus a picnic shelter, sports field and horseshoe pit. The airplane-themed playground is accented by five modern kinetic sculptures produced by Colorado artists.

### 7. Downtown Children's Playground

Speer Boulevard and Wewatta Street, Denver

Some parents cringe at this new playground's close proximity to busy Speer Boulevard. But its urbane locale — smack dab in the middle of the Central Platte Valley and steps away from The Pepsi Center, Elyse Gardens and the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver — is exactly what city dwellers love about it. There are play areas for little kids and big kids. The funky-looking equipment on site now — like the climbable "Space Net" — is only Phase 1 in a plan that includes the addition of a sand play area, shade canopy, more seating along Cherry Creek, water features and more.

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Nine-year-old Maddie Mercier sits atop the hands and rock-climbing feature at Westlands Park in Greenwood Village. (Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

sound garden.

### 9. Belleview Park

5001 S. Inca St., Englewood

Look for this playground in the shadow of the towering yellow and orange water slides at Pirates Cove Family Aquatics Center. In addition to cool equipment like a reclining swing and a funky climbing wall, this playground is a stone's throw away from a miniature train that's only \$1 to ride, and a petting zoo, only \$1 to enter.

### 10. Utah Park

1800 S. Peoria St. (at Mexico Ave.), Aurora

Aurora's largest and most popular park recently underwent a green renovation that includes a spacious 6,800-square-foot playground with swings, saddle spinners, a freeform climbing structure, crow's nest overlook and a larger playground for big kids. The park's nautical theme includes a wheelchair-accessible "Galapagos Island science lab" play structure and a raised sand table.

### 8. Stapleton Central Park

Central Park Boulevard and Martin Luther King Boulevard

Attractions at this oasis in the city include a 30-foot-long, 10-foot-high climbing wall, the Supernova, which is a blue balancing ring, and an outdoor music space that functions as a sensory

### 11. Westlands Park

5701 S. Quebec St., Greenwood Village

The scene is set for one of the premiere play spaces in Denver's south suburbs by an artistic steel arch with bird and leaf cutouts. Between the water features, climbing structures — including one that looks like a giant hand — the

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"treehouse" play area, and three different age-appropriate playgrounds, toddlers to teens can find something to love about Westlands. Parents enjoy its fantastic Rocky Mountain scenery and ample trails.

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