

# Enhancing Your Schoolyard Habitat: A Basic Plan

1. **Collect data** on what you already have
2. **Decide on a vision** for what you want
3. **Involve others** beyond students (create a habitat team):
  - Administrators- emphasize image, cost savings, cross-curricular opportunities, opportunities for student leadership
  - Groundskeepers- emphasize time and money savings (less work for them)
  - Other teachers – emphasize opportunities to teach in their subject area
  - Parents- PTAs can help with funding; parents may have connections via businesses like landscapers, nurseries, carpenters etc.
  - Service Organizations- Boy Scouts are always looking for Eagle Scout projects; large employers often encourage employees to volunteer; United Way of Buffalo and Erie County holds a big volunteer day in August.
4. **Look for funding** – in the community and beyond!
5. **Implement the project**
6. **Monitor its success**

Start small- even an unmowed corner of a yard can provide great opportunities!

# Enhancing Your Schoolyard Habitat:

## Outdoor Classroom Organizations

**National Wildlife Federation's Schoolyard Habitats** program offers a 190-page *Schoolyard Habitats How-To Guide* free on their website, along with information on how to get your schoolyard or school district certified. They also offer information on making a site accessible and how to find National Wildlife Foundation volunteers to help your project.

<http://www.nwf.org/How-to-Help/Garden-for-Wildlife/Schoolyard-Habitats/Create.aspx>

### **Nature Explore:**

*Learning With Nature Idea Book* available for \$19.99. Certified classrooms, outdoor classroom design and materials, workshops.

[www.natureexplore.org](http://www.natureexplore.org)

**Outdoor Classroom Project:** Includes a nice bibliography of outdoor classroom resources:

<http://outdoorclassroomproject.org/resources/recommended-readings/>

### **Monarch Watch Certification:**

Certify your schoolyard as a waystation for migrating butterflies! You can buy a kit with appropriate seeds and information on creating the waystation for only \$16.

<http://www.monarchwatch.org/waystations/>

## Grant Opportunities

Home Depot Community Impact Grants \$5,000 <http://homedepotfoundation.org/page/applying-for-a-grant>

Lowe's Toolbox for Education Grants \$5,000

<http://www.toolboxforeducation.com/>

Project Learning Tree Greenworks Grants \$3,000 (must attend a workshop to be eligible)

<https://www.plt.org/greenworks>

Wildones Seeds for Education Grants: \$500 <http://www.wildones.org/seeds-for-education/sfe/>

Re-Tree WNY sometimes donates trees: <http://www.re-treewny.org/>

NYSDEC School Seedling Program – Free Trees <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9393.html>

# Enhancing Your Schoolyard Habitat: Collect Data & Decide on Vision

If you want to improve your schoolyard for learning, you just need to add what all animals require from their habitat:

- Food
- Water
- Shelter
- Places to raise young

The most successful projects start by involving the kids from the onset.

To figure out where you want to go, you first need to know what you have.

## 1. Schoolyard Habitat Survey

Supplies: Clipboards, measuring tape or yard sticks, map or graph paper, survey form, field journal

You may be able to get a site plan from a groundskeeper or administrator.

Directions for Students:

- Explain they will be making a 2 or 3 dimensional model of the existing schoolyard, including information about what plants and animals are on the site.
- Break class into physical, biological and human teams:
  1. Objects team: measures dimensions of immovable objects on your site
  2. Map team
  3. Animal survey
  4. Plant survey
  5. Human Use survey
- Explain boundaries of the area they are to survey
- In each group, give each student a job (ex. one records locations on map, one takes pictures, two take measurements.)
- Explain how exact you want data and information recorded (ex. measurements to the nearest inch, etc.)

**After the initial site survey:**

- Transfer measurements on to a map that is to scale.
- Have the kids do the math to calculate the appropriate sizes for things they measured in the field.
- Make a 3-D model, using recycled materials (cardboard, yarn, scrap fabric, etc.). Model can be scaled to table-top or floor size.
- For older students, include research into things such as where utilities are located, where snow is piled in winter, etc.

## 2. Biodiversity Survey:

Older students could perform a survey of all life forms currently in or using your schoolyard. You may define the “site” differently for this survey, for example, a bird flying overhead or in a tree across the street may be counted.

- Preferably would be done over the course of the year, to record different plants and animals using the site.
- Lessons you can do before or as part of this survey include:
  - using a dichotomous key or field guides to identify living things,
  - drawing and photography lessons (silhouettes versus detailed drawing, making a photographic inventory of species, etc.)
  - researching plant and animal habitat requirements.
  - Researching the history of the property: what was there before it was a school?
- Perform a shade analysis: Use the site model and a spotlight to calculate current shading at different times of year.

## 3. Have a visioning session:

- Having discussed habitat concepts for wildlife and people, ask the students to IMAGINE their ideal school yard. What would it look like? What plants, animals and objects would be in it? How would it sound? How would it make you feel? Nothing is out of bounds for this initial discussion!
- Based on their vision, students then:
  - write an essay
  - draw or paint a picture, or
  - build a model

### For younger kids:

Ask students to identify how wildlife could get food, water, shelter and a place to raise their young from the schoolyard.

- What’s missing from the schoolyard? What could we add to the school yard to help wildlife?
- Really young students could pretend to be an animal in the schoolyard, for example a bird, rabbit, or insect. Where would they find food, water, and shelter?

## 4. Prepare a site plan

Based on the visioning session, select what features you want to incorporate into your schoolyard. Remember to consider incorporating:

- Food – bird feeders, wildflower garden, herb or vegetable garden (people)
- Water: take advantage of natural low spots: dig a small pond; add a bird bath.
- Shelter: unmowed areas, trees, brush piles, etc.
- Places to raise young: bird houses, rock piles, etc.

When placing items, consider:

- Compatible uses
- Sight lines for teachers
- Fences: can be “greened” with vines, bird houses, etc. to hide unsightly views