

Can Do!

Study Units

[Wildlife Management](#); [People and Wildlife](#)

Supplemental Information

The supplemental information provided is for developing or enhancing an outdoor classroom area. Students may pick another option, but some of the steps will apply to all projects.

Many schoolyards have lost the natural diversity of plants and animals that once lived where the building, playground, and parking lots now exist. Blacktop or cement-covered surfaces often fill much of the open space and usually what remains is manicured, monoculture grass with a few trees representing only one or two species. It is difficult to do very many outdoor environmental activities with students in this type of setting.

All organisms need suitable **habitat** – food, water, shelter, and space all in a suitable arrangement. More diverse habitat supports more kinds of animals. If you would like to see your school grounds become a more attractive place for wildlife to live then this activity is for you. Understand that inviting wildlife to live nearby will have a multitude of benefits as well as a few drawbacks. Include grounds-keepers and administrators in your plan. They must understand that the benefits of student learning far outweigh the drawbacks. So, get set and dig in!

Teaching Suggestions

Talk with local resource experts or other teachers that have been through the process of creating outdoor school areas. Contact [your county conservation board](#) (CCB) and / [or local wildlife biologist](#), etc. for information about suitable plantings/habitat development for the area.

Brainstorm with your students what they would like to see in an outdoor learning area.

Discuss with your students the components of successful projects. For a comprehensive planning guide, check out the [US Fish and Wildlife Service \(USFWS\): Schoolyard Habitats](#) project guide. Some steps to action include:

- Inventory plant and animal species currently on the school grounds
- Identify problem areas and needs (soil erosion, run-off, high winds, etc.). If an outdoor classroom area can solve problems it may be easier to convince administrators that the project is worthwhile.
- Survey staff, teachers, students, parents, and others about what they would like to see developed
- Identify areas on the school grounds where an outdoor learning area could be built (area free of utility lines or underground pipes, does not interfere with athletic fields or foot traffic, would not cause visibility or safety problems)



- Create several plan options. Each plan should include:
 - Location of site
 - Former vegetation on site
 - Soil type—to help determine plant species suited to the site
 - Type of land and land uses adjacent to project
 - Long-term sustainability of the site as an outdoor classroom (e.g., make sure there are no plans in the works to discontinue use of the school and/or construction of new school at a different location)
 - Materials needed and any labor involved (e.g., does the site need a professional to level an area, build a wetland, add lighting, etc.)
 - Available resources* – don't forget the location of the nearest water source for caring for any new plantings **Resources include money, materials, workers, special talents or skills, and more that you can use for the project.*
- Create a timeline for development and fundraising (can be spread out over several years) and include who is responsible for what
- Develop a future care and maintenance schedule and budget for when the project is completed
- Possible projects or additions to outdoor learning areas:
 - plant trees, prairie, or flowering plants to attract butterflies
 - plant wildlife food plots
 - construct wildlife houses and/or feeders
 - add brush and rock piles for wildlife shelter areas
 - make plans for biological rather than chemical control of any pest or weed species that might invade during development
- Present these plans to decision-making people (administrators, groundskeepers, and other needed officials) within the school. Students may need to find out who the responsible parties are.
- Publicize the project to the community

Evaluation

See the activity. Have students create a care and maintenance manual for the proposed outdoor classroom.

Student Materials

None

Teacher Aids

None



Additional Materials

- National Wildlife Federation: [Gardening for Wildlife](#) and [Schoolyard Habitats](#)
- [US Fish and Wildlife Service: Schoolyard Habitats](#)
- US Forest Service [Landscaping for Wildlife](#)
- Iowa State University Extension and Outreach: Landscaping for Wildlife
- Henderson, C.L. 1987. *Landscaping for Wildlife*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
- Henderson, C.L. 1992. *Woodworking for Wildlife*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

