



# GREENING THE SCHOOLYARD

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## WHAT is a green schoolyard programme?

Research shows that children need to experience the earth's natural and outdoor environments. Despite this, there are a number of factors that are keeping children disconnected from these environments. A green schoolyard provides children with a more holistic education by offering them hands-on opportunities to learn about plants and animals, the relationship between seasons and weather, the sun and earth, the interrelationships between living things in the garden, and how to grow food and flowers and care for a garden. It also provides the space and infrastructure that allows and encourages imaginative play and development of gross-motor skills.

1. A space for learning in all subjects
2. A space for play

## WHY establish a green schoolyard programme?

There are numerous benefits of green schoolyards. **Social.** Increased freedom of choice provided by green schoolyards has proven to decrease aggressive behaviour and lower crime rates. Due to the fact that green schoolyard plans encourage imaginative play, students' creativity and decision-making abilities increase. Green schoolyards are also known to be beneficial to students with special needs, such as autism, as they support their individual desires to interact with the environment the way they want to. When designing green schoolyards, it is important to make the design appropriate both for girls and boys as studies have shown that they play differently. **Academic.** Green schoolyard programs also increase students' enthusiasm for learning which helps them excel academically. Students with learning styles that do not normally lend well to excelling in the classroom can often flourish on the schoolyard. This can greatly increase their confidence and change the social dynamic of the class. **Health.** Garden programs on green schoolyards give students the opportunity to experience and actively participate in the entire process of food production from planting, growing, picking and eating. This helps them appreciate the value of fruits and vegetables and create life-long eating habits that can help them stay clear from chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease. **Environmental.** Green schoolyards also help to raise environmentally conscious individuals who understand the value of the natural environment and will be willing to take steps to protect it throughout their lives.

## WHERE have green schoolyards programmes been established?

**Everywhere!** Schoolyard greening initiatives have taken place at schools throughout the United States, Britain, Canada and other countries as well. There are a number of organizations and businesses throughout North America designed to assist schools in greening their schoolyards.

## WHO is involved in establishing green schoolyard programmes?

Actors involved in green schoolyard programs include students, teachers, parents, community members, organization, businesses, and the government. The more stakeholders involved, the better the success and guarantee of longevity of the green schoolyard program.

## HOW do you establish a green schoolyard programme?

There is no one way of greening a schoolyard; the establishment of green schoolyard programs within schools is a very organic process. Green schoolyard programs can include a variety of elements; usually starting with an initial plan, these elements develop gradually as the needs of the students and staff change. Green schoolyards **have included** the following: vegetable and flower gardens, community gardens, habitat gardens, butterfly gardens, ethno botanical gardens, greenhouses, worm composting, tree nurseries, bird and bat houses, native shrub collections, woodlands, meadows, ponds, ecological drainage systems, outdoor classrooms, sun shelters, seating, large rocks, shade trees, pathways, public art installations, community map mural games, sundials, time capsules, and archways.

Although there is no standard approach that a school can take when establishing a green schoolyard, below are suggested **STEPS** that can be followed:

1. Gather interested and dedicated individuals willing to be involved.
2. Conduct an analysis of the current state of the schoolyard which includes an inventory of the vegetation and other existing infrastructure.
3. Identify the needs of the school as well as how the schoolyard can be improved and where greening programs can be established.
4. Establish a plan that includes a timeline of when these improvements will be made.
5. Step into action! Start implementing the changes step-by-step.
6. Voila, your green schoolyard program is in existence!

