

# School Land Labs

Although teaching and learning have always occurred outdoors, most formal education takes place in the school and classroom. School land labs are any place outside of a walled classroom or school building. A land lab can be the school's parking lot, playground, fence row bordering the school grounds, or grassed or wooded area around the building. Many teachers recognize areas outside the school building as places where learning can thrive. School land labs encourage teachers to teach outside the school building. Teaching lessons in the outdoor land lab enhances the curriculum of the textbook by allowing students to apply new learning. Learning becomes more exciting.

## **Land labs are called many other names:**

- Outdoor Classrooms
- Habitats for Learning
- Green Space
- Green Room
- Schoolyard Habitats
- School Nature Centers

## **Over the years outdoor areas have brought benefits to education:**

- Provides a natural area for cooperative learning, hands-on-activities, and problem solving.
- Provides a natural setting where the goals of different learning disciplines can be met, (e.g., science, math, social studies, languages, art, PE, health, and music).
- Nurtures different curricular approaches, (e.g., single discipline, integrated, thematic).
- Addresses different styles of learning, (e.g., visual, kinesthetic, auditory, symbolic).
- Assists the learner in making a connection between the environment and real-life education.

## **Important early steps connect the curriculum to the outdoors:**

- Review the school's course of study and academic content standards to determine what can be taught outdoors.
- Integrate across the curriculum using the environment as the integrating context for learning.

## **An inventory of the outdoor site lets you know what features are available.**

- Location (e.g., on school grounds, in neighborhoods, local natural areas)
- Physical features (e.g., drainage routes, rocks, erosion of a slope).
- Cultural features (e.g., sandstone foundation, fences).
- Biological feature (e.g., trees, animal habitats).

**A progressive approach helps to ensure long-term use.**

- Teachers and learners use, or continue to use, the existing site to meet educational objectives.
- Based upon actual use of the land lab, teachers, learners and others make site improvements, “enhancements” as needs arise (e.g., attend to poison ivy, pick up litter, mulch muddy areas, hag a bird feeder).
- While using the “enhanced” existing site, a broad-based committee designs and implements a long-range plan that matches site features and attributes that have been discovered in large part through use of the site. It should also identify needs for further development.

**Key players in a land lab project need to be identified:**

- Administrators
- Teachers
- Maintenance staff
- Parents
- Community members
- Students
- Natural resource agency personnel
- Local business representatives

**A long range plan gives the land lab direction:**

- Organize a support system
- Develop a program (e.g., goals, objectives, and learning experiences)
- Identify materials, equipment and resources needed
- Calculate cost and funding considerations
- Identify the land lab project developer(s)
- Identify maintenance of land lab - long range
- Identify the amount of staff time that will be involved in the land lab

**Resource information:**

- Habitats for Learning- Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Soil and Water Conservation, ODNR-DSWC- Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (OFSWCD), OSU Extension
- Integrating Environmental Education and Science- Environmental Education Council of Ohio (EECO)
- Wild School Sites- Project Wild (ODNR Division Of Wildlife)
- Twenty-Twenty: Projects and Activities for WILD School sites
- EE programs and projects: Leopold Education Project (LEP), Project Wild, Project Wet, Project Learning Tree (PLT), Wonders of Wetlands (WOW)
- ODNR: Life History Notes
- Peterson Field Guides

## Websites

National Wildlife Federation

[www.nwf.org/schoolyardhabitats](http://www.nwf.org/schoolyardhabitats)

<https://www.nwf.org/certifiedwildlifehabitat>

A guide to the planning & development of outdoor classrooms

<http://fsc.fernbank.edu/PDF/Outdoor%20Classroom.pdf>

Building Nature Habitats: Resources for Improving Habitats

<http://www1.deq.louisiana.gov/portal/DIVISIONS/BusinessandCommunityOutreach/EarthDay/BuildingNatureHabitats.aspx>

Outdoor land lab from Indiana DNR [https://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/files/fo-Guidelines\\_Outd\\_Labs.pdf](https://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/files/fo-Guidelines_Outd_Labs.pdf)

Learning through Landscapes (UK) <http://www.ltl.org.uk>

The *Green Teacher* journal has had several issues devoted to outdoor classrooms

<http://greenteacher.com>

Access Excellence @ the National Health Museum (search “outdoor classrooms”)

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

South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks Statewide Education Programs <https://gfp.sd.gov/education/>

The Evergreen Foundation (Canadian) Learning Grounds <https://www.evergreen.ca/downloads/pdfs/Guide-for-Schools.pdf>

Classroom Feeder Watch <https://feederwatch.org/>

Journey North <https://journeynorth.org/>

Monarch Watch <http://www.monarchwatch.org>

NAAEE <https://naaee.org/>

Ohio EPA – OEEF <https://epa.ohio.gov/oeef/>

Project WET [www.projectwet.org](http://www.projectwet.org)

Project WILD [www.projectwild.org](http://www.projectwild.org)

The National Gardening Association’s Kid Gardening Page <https://kidsgardening.org/>

Wild Ones Landscapers <http://www.for-wild.org>

EE Clearinghouses – for further resources

<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupname?key=ERIC%20Clearinghouse%20for%20Science%20Mathematics%20and%20Environmental%20Education>