

Greening Your School Grounds

“The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now.”

— ANONYMOUS



Background

Schools across Canada are involved in projects to change their school yards in order to make them more environmentally friendly and create exciting learning spaces. Fortunately, there are many groups across Canada that have experience with school yard naturalization projects and that are actively involved in helping schools to accomplish their goals. Some of these organizations are listed on page 30. You and your students can learn from them and benefit from their experiences.



Benefits

Greening your school grounds can:

- create a place to learn about the environment as a complex interconnected series of relationships
- offer hands-on learning opportunities in all areas of the curriculum
- provide a diversity of play experiences and increase opportunities for creative play
- develop a sense of school and community ownership and belonging
- help reduce school ground violence among students
- produce an ecologically and aesthetically improved landscape
- create a chemical-free landscape
- be a model for environmental rehabilitation and community building
- demonstrate the role of trees in climate change and help address some of its effects:
 - provide shade from harmful UV radiation
 - cool or replace heat-generating parking lots and paved areas
 - shelter buildings to reduce heating and cooling costs
 - reduce emissions of greenhouse gases

Information and photos provided by the Tree Canada Foundation.



- 1. Check for support and spread the news.** Check with your school principal to make sure you have the school's support. Your principal can also help you deal with red tape and acquiring any special permission you may need to proceed. Then, spread the news! Invite students, parents, teachers and the neighbourhood to get involved.
- 2. Create a planning group.** Your task goes beyond planting some grass and a few trees. You will be planning, designing, raising funds and asking local businesses to provide services. If you want to succeed you will need several managers — the movers and shakers who will sustain these efforts over the long term. And, if your project is going to take place over several years, you will want to be sure to keep the door open for new people to get involved and keep the momentum going.
- 3. Survey the grounds.** Look at the physical features of your school grounds and acquire a site plan from the school board or archives. You will need to determine what areas are available for your project and which features should be incorporated (parking areas, sports fields) or avoided (buried telephone and gas lines, water pipes).
- 4. Identify your school needs.** Each project is different and reflects the needs and desires of the school community. What do you want to achieve? What do the students want? You might want to get some ideas from projects that have been successfully completed by other groups.
- 5. Create a concept.** Prepare a landscape plan with the students and teachers to ensure that the results are a team effort and that everyone learns from the process. Are there artists in the group? They might want to create sketches of how the new space will look. Assign someone to look at the resources you require, the costs and possible sources.
- 6. Break your landscape plan into phases or steps.** Using your plan, divide the project into smaller phases or steps. Start small and each accomplishment will be rewarding for everyone. A new landscape won't happen overnight. It is likely to take three to five years or more to create the environment you want.
- 7. Action plan: Let's do it!** Prepare an action plan including timelines and responsibilities and start organizing the resources.
- 8. Measure the difference and celebrate your success.** Make sure you record your progress through photos, video or other means. Spread news of your efforts through the local media. And celebrate! Plan a special ceremony, a ribbon-cutting party, a fresh-air community open house, a school picnic, or a recognition ceremony for donors, sponsors and other community members who helped out.

Students at *École Secondaire Franco Supérieur* in Thunder Bay launched a **Greening School Grounds** project at their school during the summer of 2000 as part of the city's Forest Capital of Canada celebration. Greening School Grounds is one of Tree Canada's national tree planting programs. This is an excellent example of how students can learn to take personal responsibility for the environment they live in.

www.borealforest.org



before



after



Tree Canada Foundation actively promotes the planting and care of trees in urban and rural environments and sponsors a "Greening School Grounds" program. They can help you plan your project, provide funding and fundraising guidance, and provide ideas on how to use the landscape as part of the curriculum. Tree Canada has resource staff across Canada who are willing to assist in greening your school community. www.treecanada.ca



Tree Canada Reboisons le Canada

Evergreen is dedicated to 'bringing nature back to our cities' through education and community action projects. Through its Learning Grounds program, Evergreen has helped over 1,100 schools across Canada undertake naturalization projects. Evergreen offers national grants, practical guidebooks and videos, regional workshops, an interactive web site with an on-line registry of successful projects, and staff who can offer practical advice.

www.evergreen.ca



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LEARNING GROUNDS

Canadian Wildlife Federation sponsors National Wildlife Week and is one of Canada's largest environmental organizations. CWF has many resources dealing with naturalization of backyards and various other landscapes.

www.cwf-fcf.org



Green Teacher has published a book called *Greening School Grounds, Creating Habitats for Learning*. This 120-page book is an excellent tool to promote hands-on, interdisciplinary learning about the environment through projects that benefit schools and increase greenspace and biodiversity in communities.

www.greenteacher.com