

# Teaching in the Dirt:

## Designing Outdoor Classrooms



### 1-2-1 TAKE ACTION NOW WORKSHEET

#### Getting Started: Needs Assessment

Assess Needs and Interests of all potential Outdoor Classrooms Users.

SAMPLE LETTER: This list can also be adapted to brainstorm with the children.

*Dear Parents & Community members,*

*Our school is designing an outdoor classroom. An outdoor classroom can take many forms and include many types of "learning stations." Our goal is to provide hands-on, outdoor learning opportunities for all of the students and to utilize multiple disciplinary skills in a fun and exciting outdoor environment. For example, a butterfly garden can be used as an area to study life cycles, an inspiration for writing, mathematical activities using geometry or all of the above! (examples can be changed to be age appropriate for your program) Please fill out the following survey and return it to us so that we can assess your level of interest in the outdoor classroom project and so that we can address any concerns you may have. If you would like to assist with the development of the Outdoor Classroom or serve on the planning committee, please write your name and contact information below.*

*Please check the outdoor classroom components and learning stations that you would like to see in our outdoor classroom (you can mark more than one).*

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bird Feeders            | <input type="checkbox"/> Nature Trail          | <input type="checkbox"/> Weather Station   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Butterfly Garden        | <input type="checkbox"/> Nesting Boxes         | <input type="checkbox"/> Wetland           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compost Area            | <input type="checkbox"/> Raised Bed Gardens    | <input type="checkbox"/> Wildflower Meadow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dry Stream Bed          | <input type="checkbox"/> Theme Gardens         | <input type="checkbox"/> Woodland          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Green House             | <input type="checkbox"/> Turtle Habitat        |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Shelter/Gazebo | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetable/Herb Garden |  |

*Please let us know which of the following tasks you are willing to help with, if any:*

- Serve on the Planning Committee*
- Help Develop a Schoolyard Wildlife Habitat*
- Assist with the Master Plan & Layout/Design*
- Solicit Local Donations for Outdoor Classroom Projects*
- Write Grants for Outdoor Classroom Projects*
- Document the Outdoor Classroom Development with Photos*
- Write Articles and Press Releases about the Outdoor Classroom*
- Provide Labor to help Build Outdoor Classroom Learning Stations*
- Coordinate Parents and other Volunteers for Work Days*
- Volunteer to help with Maintenance on Work Days*
- Monitor & Refurbish the Outdoor Activity Kits as Needed*
- Chaperone Student during Outdoor Classroom Activities*

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### 1-2-2 TAKE ACTION NOW WORKSHEET

#### Getting Started: Needs Assessment

Assess Needs and Interests of all potential Outdoor Classrooms Users

This is another SAMPLE of a Needs Assessment. This one is for teachers.

*Dear Teachers,*

*Our school is designing an outdoor classroom. An outdoor classroom can take many forms and include many types of “learning stations.” Our goal is to provide hands-on, outdoor learning opportunities for all of the students and to utilize multiple disciplinary skills in a fun and exciting outdoor environment. For example, a butterfly garden can be used as an area to study life cycles, an inspiration for writing, mathematical activities using geometry or all of the above!*

*Teacher Name* \_\_\_\_\_ *Grade Level* \_\_\_\_\_

*1. Do you see a need for an outdoor classroom?*

*2. Do you see yourself using an outdoor classroom as part of your curriculum?*

*If so, how often do you think you would use it?*

*Once a year*

*2–3 times a year*

*Once a month*

*2–3 times a month*

*More than 3 times a month*

*3. What areas of your curriculum do you think would benefit from the use of an outdoor classroom? (List specific objectives.)*

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### **1-2-3 TAKE ACTION NOW WORKSHEET**

#### **Getting Started: Site Inventory**

Water?

Sun?

Shade?

Soil Quality?

Accessibility?

Existing Plants, Trees?

Near by Hazards?

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### **1-2-4 TAKE ACTION NOW WORKSHEET**

Spend a few days observing children in your outdoor play space and answer the following questions.

1. What do children do first when they get outside?
2. Are children playing together and working together?
3. Are children bored and not working together?
4. Are children drawn to a particular area?
  - Sandbox?
  - Structure?
  - Hidden alcove?
5. Are there any Outdoor Learning Stations that children can explore?
6. How long do the children play outdoors?

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### 1-2-5 TAKE ACTION NOW WORKSHEET

#### **Getting Started: 6 Foundation Projects to get you started**

Try one of these projects and take notes on how it worked for you.

*Please visit the Resource Library for "How To" directions.*

1. No Dig Newspaper Gardening
2. Compost Pile
3. Kids Tools and Storage
4. Soil Preparation
5. Pulling Weeds
6. Watering