

THE SCHOOLYARD HABITAT PROJECT

The Schoolyard Habitat Project at Arbor Schools was initiated in September 2002. By introducing a variety of drought-tolerant, native plants in the schoolyard, we sought to restore the natural environment while providing an exceptional place for children to be, play and learn. Our biologically diverse Schoolyard Habitat represents a permanent and sustainable gift to the present and future children of Arbor Schools and the surrounding community.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the Schoolyard Habitat Project are to:

- Restore the native environment by transforming a once barren schoolyard landscape into a biodiverse, natural habitat using a variety of native plants;
- Establish an exceptional outdoor learning environment and play space for children and the larger community;
- Attract and nurture wildlife through the introduction of a variety of native plants and the establishment of microhabitats where wildlife can feed, find shelter and nest;
- Implement water-wise landscaping practices by installing drought-tolerant plant species and rain barrels;
- Serve as a model for sustainable landscaping practices and educate children, their families and the community about the effects of landscape practices on wildlife, water quality and quantity and the larger ecosystem;
- Provide opportunities for ongoing stewardship, community outreach and education.

PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The student-run Schoolyard Habitat Project has leveraged tremendous support from families, staff, students, local businesses and individuals representing organizations both public and private. Through our partnerships with landscape architect Darwin Webb (<http://www.darwinwebb.com/default.htm>) and Janet Sailer at the Sammamish Plateau Water and Sewer District (<http://www.sammplat.wa.org/arborschool.html>), our project has seen solid beginnings.

Among our numerous accomplishments, we have:

- Secured a \$19,500 environmental grant from King County;
- To date, planted ~800 native and drought-tolerant plants (link to plant list);
- Established five, new garden areas with 3'-wide paths for wheelchair accessibility:
 - ◆ Butterfly Garden
 - ◆ Native Shade Garden
 - ◆ Interpretive Trail with seasonal pond
 - ◆ Lucky Land Hill with tunnel
 - ◆ Amphitheatre Gathering Space
- Received publication in local newspapers:
 - ◆ *Sammamish Review* (December 17, 2003)

- ◆ *Issaquah Press* (June 18, 2003)
- ◆ *Sammamish Review* (June 18, 2003)
- ◆ *King County Journal* (June 14, 2003)
(<http://www.kingcountyjournal.com/sited/story/html/134507>);
- ◆ *Sammamish Review* (June 4, 2003)
- Built three, raised vegetable beds;
- Installed four rain barrels;
- Constructed a 10x10' greenhouse with multiple tiers of shelving.

PRESS

Check these local publications to learn more about our project.

- *Sammamish Review* (December 17, 2003)
- *Issaquah Press* (June 18, 2003)
- *Sammamish Review* (June 18, 2003)
- *King County Journal* (June 14, 2003)
(<http://www.kingcountyjournal.com/sited/story/html/134507>);
- *Sammamish Review* (June 4, 2003)

STUDENT WORK IN THE SCHOOLYARD HABITAT

The Schoolyard Habitat serves as a living laboratory where students can “learn by doing” through hands-on investigations, observing and exploring nature and engaging in lessons that otherwise would be learned in the classroom. All classes integrate the Schoolyard Habitat into the existing curricula at various levels, particularly emphasizing connections with life and Earth science.

- Classes utilize the Schoolyard Habitat regularly for nature study, observation and reflection, horticulture and as a backdrop for practical life and cultural studies.
- Each of the elementary classes has adopted a garden in the Schoolyard Habitat. All elementary students have adopted a plant within their class garden.
- Upper Elementary classes meet weekly with the Naturalist Teacher for maintenance, construction, horticulture and nature study in the Schoolyard Habitat.
- The Middle School has lead the school throughout all phases of the project, including the participatory design process, landscape design, plant selection, garden installation, trouble-shooting, construction, maintenance, public relations and events promotion. Students conduct research and field studies, collaborate with experts in the community and witness their efforts manifested in the Schoolyard Habitat.

Student work in the Schoolyard Habitat is ongoing.

- Students in the Middle School are developing educational signage for the Butterfly Garden and Interpretive Trail.
- Students in the Middle School and Upper Elementary are constructing a 10x12' shed.
- Students are designing and creating a 10'-diameter compass rose mosaic for the center of the amphitheatre.

- Future gardens—to be designed and installed by students—will include a maze, rock garden, Zen garden and children’s garden.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students enjoy the Schoolyard Habitat as a place to experience the wonders of nature. Among the numerous benefits for students, the comprehensive Schoolyard Habitat Project promotes:

- Children’s natural learning abilities by leveraging diverse learning modalities and individual learning styles;
- New opportunities to integrate and apply classroom studies through concrete means and real-world experiences;
- A love of learning as the natural habitat becomes a diverse forum for exploration, discovery and multisensory experiences;
- An understanding of systems, cycles and interconnectedness in nature, and, by extension, to other situations and environments;
- A conservation ethic and respect for life through awareness, appreciation and understanding of natural habitats, native species and biodiversity;
- Spontaneous, complex and creative play behavior;
- Enhanced sense of self and self-esteem through meaningful involvement and connections;
- Improved social interactions and relationships and integration among children;
- Restoration, comfort and healing, especially during times of stress or emotional conflict;
- A sense of place and feelings of wholeness and oneness with the rest of creation;
- School and community pride.

SUPPORTERS

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to those who have supported of our project.

- Darwin Webb, landscape architect (<http://www.darwinwebb.com/default.htm>);
- Janet Sailer, Public Information and Conservation Specialist, Sammamish Plateau Water and Sewer District (<http://www.sammplat.wa.org/>);
- King County (<http://www.metrokc.gov/>);
- Arbor Schools students and their families;
- Arbor Schools staff;
- GDN Enterprises, Inc.
- Dale Scilley, Red-E Topsoil (<http://www.red-e-topsoil.com/door/>);
- Cedar Grove Compost (<http://www.cedar-grove.com/>);
- Lee Farm & Nursery, Fall City;
- Perennials Nursery, Issaquah;
- Storm Lake Growers, Inc., Snohomish;
- Washington State Department of Natural Resources (Doug McClelland) (<http://www.dnr.wa.gov/htdocs/adm/comm/fireinfo.html>);
- Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust (<http://www.mtsgreenway.org/>);
- Save Lake Sammamish (Erika Vandenbrande) (<http://www.scn.org/earth/savelake/>);

- Mary Queen of Peace Church (<http://www.mqp.org/>);
- Joanie Hackett, landscape designer;
- Mike Crippen, local fence installer;
- Russell Link, Urban Wildlife Projects Coordinator, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/>) and author of Landscaping for Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest;
- Squak Mountain Nursery (<http://www.squakmntnursery.com/>);
- Winter's Historic House at Mercer Slough Nature Park (<http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/page.asp?view=2106>);
- Design Guild Contractors.

CONTACT US

For questions about the Schoolyard Habitat Project or to arrange a tour, contact Naturalist Teacher and Schoolyard Habitat Project Coordinator Deborah Mikulina Shultz at Deborah@ArborSchool.teamon.com.

Carefully designed natural environments help maintain the balance necessary for wellbeing and the healthy growth of children. Rich natural environments can help children unfold their potential in a fluid way, enjoying every stage of development, and building knowledge and wisdom at each level. Natural places can be designed like a dynamic mirror, immersing the child in all the facets of life. Regenerative cycles communicate clear messages of hope and continuity amidst fragmented daily life. Places wrap us in an endless richness of colors, textures, tastes, fragrances, and movement. Natural objects encourage curiosity and a passion for learning. Dramatic meteorological phenomena (thunder, winds, rain) teach humans to re-dimension their finite strength in relation to the power of nature.

– Robin Moore & Nilda Cosco
Natural Learning Initiative