

Outdoor Learning Environments for Young Children

Principles for Creating a Space:

1. Divide the space into clearly defined areas (play, exploration, art, music, instruction)
2. Include a rich mix of activities for children to choose from
3. Give areas of the outdoor classroom simple names, let children name them. Have them clearly marked with signs.
4. Be sure every area is visible to supervising adults at all times.
5. Use a variety of natural materials (stumps for chairs and benches, sand, dirt, gravel, etc.)
6. Materials should be durable and low maintenance.
7. Personalize the design with plant species native to your area.
8. Make sure the space meets all regulatory specifications for safety.

Recommended areas:

1. Entry Feature (such as an arbor, gate, trees, etc.)
2. Provide an open area for free play.
3. Create an area for climbing and crawling. Does NOT have to be pre-made plastic equipment. Can be tree stumps, platforms, boulders, etc.
4. Create an area for building with blocks, a level surface
5. Create a nature art area (working with natural materials such as seeds, sticks, leaves, flowers, sand, rocks, snow, etc.)
6. Messy materials area, surround the perimeter with logs or landscaping edging. Include wood chips for soft surface. Can include dirt, sticks for building, etc.
7. Music and movement area, with outdoor music equipment such as a bamboo xylophone, bells, wind chimes, etc.
8. Garden area for authentic learning. The children can plant, observe, harvest and eat vegetables.
9. Distinct pathways through plantings
10. Gathering area for large group lessons, such as a ring of benches made from tree stumps
11. Storage area for items that must be secured
12. Supplemental areas such as water features, fountains, sand, dirt digging, greenhouse to extend growing into the colder months

Can use the Look-Move-Sketch learning model:

<http://www.dimensionsfoundation.org/education/information/documents/2010-03-18.pdf>

<http://www.arborday.org/explore/>

