



What is the Alabama Outdoor Classroom Program?

The Alabama Outdoor Classroom (AOC) program provides on-site assistance and technical support to educators, administrators, students, and community volunteers who wish to create sustainable wildlife habitats and effective outdoor classroom sites on their school grounds.

To participate in the AOC program, a school must formally enroll in the program and follow the steps discussed in the Outdoor Classroom Planning Guide throughout the development, certification and use of their outdoor classroom site.

What is an Outdoor Classroom?

An outdoor classroom site includes outdoor area(s) on the school grounds that provide hands-on learning opportunities and allows students of all ages to utilize multi-disciplinary skills including math, science, social studies, and language arts in a fun and exciting environment.

An outdoor classroom can be as small as a courtyard or several acres in size.

An outdoor classroom site is designed to provide habitat (food, water, cover, and places to raise young) for local wildlife, and provide opportunities for students to observe wildlife and explore nature.

How do you use an Outdoor Classroom as an educational tool?

It only takes a little creativity to turn a school's campus into a living laboratory and outdoor classroom. Review the course of study objectives and topics that you already teach, and research activity ideas that would teach these objectives and topics using hands-on, multi-curricular, outdoor activities.

Free outdoor classroom activities and lesson plans are available on the Alabama Wildlife Federation's website including themed activities that incorporate wildlife such as birds and butterflies along with field journal activities that help teach specific science, math and language arts course of study standards.

In addition, there are many citizen science projects such as the Cornell University's Great Backyard Bird Count, Journey North's Monarch Butterfly Migration, and California Academy of Science's iNaturalist program.

What is an outdoor learning station?

An outdoor learning station is an area developed to help teach about a specific topic such as a weather station, vegetable garden, or pollinator garden. The outdoor learning station may also include habitat created for specific wildlife species such as a frog pond, butterfly garden or bluebird box trail. These learning stations provide a wealth of hands-on, cross-curricular, outdoor activities and real-world, learning experiences.



Which schools can participate in the Alabama Outdoor Classroom Program?

All Alabama K-12 public and private schools.

How long will it take to develop an Outdoor Classroom at our school?

Many schools choose to develop their outdoor classroom in phases, taking anywhere from two to five years to complete all phases and projects. It is important to remember that outdoor classroom and schoolyard wildlife habitat projects offer teaching opportunities and student involvement from their inception even if they change from year to year. The most sustainable and effective projects are those that are developed slowly and methodically following a master plan, taking advantage of the teaching opportunities every step of the way.

What are the benefits of enrolling in the Alabama Outdoor Classroom Program?

After enrolling in the program, Outdoor Classroom schools receive the following for **FREE**:

- ❖ Outdoor Classroom Planning Guides for their planning committees;
- ❖ Technical and organizational assistance for their planning committees throughout all phases of development, certification, and use of the outdoor classroom sites;
- ❖ On-site consultations with Alabama Wildlife Federation Outdoor Classroom Consultants who have been trained to assist schools with the development of their outdoor classrooms;
- ❖ In-service teacher training workshops to equip teachers with cross-curriculum activities and materials that can be integrated into their daily lesson plans and used in the outdoor classrooms;
- ❖ Eligibility to apply for Alabama Wildlife Federation Outdoor Classroom Grants when available; and
- ❖ Alabama Outdoor Classroom Certification and National Wildlife Federation Schoolyard Habitat® Certification.

How much does an Outdoor Classroom cost?

Remember—you can take your students outside today to enjoy hands-on, outdoor activities at no cost. However, schools that wish to enhance their schoolyards with wildlife habitats and outdoor learning stations may develop outdoor classroom sites using anywhere from \$1,000 to \$20,000. The costs vary depending on your project plans, what materials and labor you can get donated, and how much money your school can raise through fundraisers and grants. Part of the educational value of an outdoor classroom is the inherent opportunity to be creative and resourceful. A little ingenuity can go a long way in showing a child the power of “reuse and recycle,” which will reduce your costs considerably.

Who will do all of the work?

An outdoor classroom project offers a wonderful opportunity for the school and surrounding community to work together to enrich the educational opportunities for the students in their community. Your local Outdoor Classroom (OC) Consultant can help your school’s outdoor classroom planning committee organize OC Work Days to develop the outdoor classroom and create a long-term maintenance plan. At OC Work Days, teachers, students, parents and community volunteers work side-by-side to help build the various outdoor learning stations and/or help maintain the outdoor classroom from year to year. We encourage you to contact your local OC Consultant for technical assistance and to use the free planning materials on the Alabama Wildlife Federation’s website to plan your work day events and maintenance projects.



What steps should you take to become a certified Outdoor Classroom school?

Follow the steps below and utilize the suggestions, checklists and resources in your Outdoor Classroom Planning Guide and on the Alabama Wildlife Federation's website:

- Step 1:** Collect & Share Information
- Step 2:** Organize Planning Committee
- Step 3:** Enroll in AOC Program
- Step 4:** Evaluate your Campus
- Step 5:** Develop Master Plan
- Step 6:** Obtain Funding & Support
- Step 7:** Construct the Outdoor Classroom
- Step 8:** Integrate the OC into your Curriculum
- Step 9:** Establish a Maintenance Plan
- Step 10:** Certify your Outdoor Classroom

How do you know when you're ready to certify your Outdoor Classroom site?

You are ready for certification once you and your planning committee have accomplished the following:

- ❖ An active planning committee that meets at least four times a year;
- ❖ A sustainable Master Plan with short-term and long-term goals;
- ❖ Outdoor learning stations with educational signage;
- ❖ Hands-on, multi-curricular outdoor activities;
- ❖ A Wildlife Habitat for local wildlife;
- ❖ An in-service Outdoor Classroom Workshop for the faculty;
- ❖ A maintenance plan including summer maintenance; and
- ❖ An outdoor classroom that you are ready to present as a model for other schools across Alabama.

For more details?

- ❖ Review the steps and suggestions in the Alabama Outdoor Classroom Planning Guide.
- ❖ Visit the Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF) website at <https://www.alabamawildlife.org/> and use the free online planning materials and resources.
- ❖ Contact April Lupardus Waltz, AWF Alabama Outdoor Classroom Program Coordinator, at aprilwaltz@alabamawildlife.org to ask questions and set up a free on-site visit with your local AWF Outdoor Classroom Consultant.