



Some planning committee members may want to jump directly into building the outdoor classroom as your first step without doing much in the way of planning, but we highly recommend that you follow the important planning suggestions in Steps 1-6 so that your outdoor classroom is effective as an educational tool and sustainable for years to come. After you have completed your master plan and you have obtained the necessary funding and support, you can now enjoy getting your hands dirty as you **construct your outdoor classroom**. Below are tips to help you with the construction process.

## Construction Tips

Below are tips to consider once you are ready to begin constructing your outdoor learning stations and other components (like benches and educational kiosks).

- ❑ **Use the construction instructions** in the Outdoor Learning Station project plans found on the Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF) website, and then modify them to fit your school's needs.
- ❑ **Consider starting with a small and easy project** such as a 4 foot by 6 foot raised bed veggie garden to help get more teachers interested in helping with future outdoor classroom projects.
- ❑ When constructing large outdoor classroom projects such as a backyard pond or pavilion, **ask the Central Office for approval** to make sure that the project meets all construction codes and that it will not interfere with current utility lines or future building plans.
- ❑ **Utilize durable materials and native plants** when building learning stations and components to help keep maintenance at a minimum.
- ❑ **Be flexible** whenever you have to make adjustments in your construction plans, take your time, don't get discouraged, and proceed as you see fit.

## Outdoor Classroom (OC) Work Day Tips

Contact your local OC Consultant to help you organize an OC Work Day when students, teachers, parents and community volunteers can work side-by-side to help build, plant, and maintain outdoor learning stations and related components in your outdoor classroom. Your OC Consultant can also attend the event to provide technical support and help supervise the projects. Below are tips to help make your OC Work Day a success:

- ❑ **Game Plan:** Use the planning checklist and materials on the OC Work Day webpage of the AWF website to help you plan your event.
- ❑ **Event Date:** Hold your OC Work Day on a school day to involve students in the construction of the outdoor classroom



Involve students in all aspects of your OC Work Days if possible.

projects so that they will feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the outdoor classroom, and check your school calendar to avoid scheduling conflicts.

- ❑ **Rain Date:** Be sure to set a "rain date" for the day after the event date in case your original OC Day date gets rained out.
- ❑ **Pre-OC Day Activities:** If you haven't taken students outside to the outdoor classroom area yet, be sure to take them out for activities before the OC Work Day. A fun, free activity to do is "Evidence of Wildlife" (*found on AWF's website*) so students can study how the biodiversity increases on the school grounds after adding wildlife habitat stations in the outdoor classroom site.
- ❑ **Project List:** Create a list of the tasks and projects that you plan to work on during the OC Work Day.
- ❑ **Digging & Utilities Approval Form:** Ask your school system's Buildings and Maintenance Supervisor to spray paint the locations of the utility lines a day or two before the construction day so that those lines can be avoided when digging.
- ❑ **Class Participation:** Although the goal is to include all students, due to limited space you should only plan for four to six students to work together at one time on each project so that none of the students are left without a task. Thus, if you have 6

different projects that day, you could use approximately 24 to 36 students during each time slot.

- ❑ **Class Rotation Schedule:** Create a schedule that gives teachers a specific time to arrive in the outdoor classroom with their students, rotates classes every 30-45 minutes, and allows 5 minutes of transition time as one group leaves and another group arrives.
- ❑ **Student Consent Form:** Send a consent form to parents and guardians at least two weeks prior to the event to get permission for photos of the students to be taken during the event and to let parents know that students must wear appropriate outdoor clothes and closed-toe shoes to participate to keep students safe.
- ❑ **Volunteers:** Invite parents, grandparents, Master Gardeners and other community volunteers to help with construction projects.
- ❑ **Volunteers & Support Needed Form:** Send this form to parents and guardians at least two weeks prior to the event to allow parents to sign up for specific time slots and to donate specific materials needed for the learning stations being constructed that day.
- ❑ **Volunteer Schedule:** Schedule at least 2-3 volunteers for each project during each timeslot, with volunteer shifts beginning at 7:30 am to help with setting up and ending around 3:30 pm to help with clean up.
- ❑ **Volunteer Log:** Keep a list of your volunteers' names, contact information, and the number of hours donated by each volunteer, so that you can send them thank you notes and invite them to future work day events. *(Utilize the OC Volunteer Log in the OC Day planning materials on AWF's website.)*
- ❑ **Volunteer Supplies:** Remind volunteers to wear appropriate clothes and closed-toe shoes for working outdoors, and to bring hats, gloves, sunscreen, extra water, shovels, wheel borrows, and power drills (if needed).
- ❑ **Volunteer Tent:** Set up a shade tent and ask the PTA/PTO to provide drinks and snacks under the tent. If possible, provide lunch for volunteers who stay the whole day.
- ❑ **OC Work Day Supplies:** Organize all of your supplies the day before the event including the following:
  - ❖ All of the materials and plants needed to complete all of the projects and learning stations

that day

- ❖ 30 durable 1-gallon milk jugs (cut tops off but leave handles on) for students to transport materials such as crushed limestone, mulch, or soil
  - ❖ 2 strong/sturdy wheel borrows for each learning station or project;
  - ❖ 6 shovels for students at each learning station or project area that requires digging;
  - ❖ 2 extension cords for drills, saws, or other construction equipment;
  - ❖ 2 cameras to record the progress made during the OC Day along with "before" and "after" photos;
  - ❖ 2 hoses for filling the pond, filling the bog, or watering trees, bushes and flowers; and
  - ❖ 2 large garbage cans for trash and debris.
- ❑ **Safety Protocol:** Review how to properly use tools such as shovels or hammers before allowing the students to use them, and provide safety goggles when needed.
  - ❑ **Press Release:** Send a press release to your local tv stations and newspapers at least one week before the event. *(Use the example press release on the OC Work Day webpage on AWF's website.)*



Milk jugs with the tops cut off can be used to distribute crushed limestone for the path, mulch for the gardens, or water for the plants.