



As you develop and use your outdoor classroom, be sure to **establish a maintenance plan** that includes the routine weekly maintenance tasks as well as the seasonal maintenance tasks required to sustain your outdoor learning stations for years to come. Be sure to include the teachers and students in the maintenance of the outdoor classroom so they will feel ownership of it and will be encouraged to use it as an educational tool. A properly maintained outdoor classroom and schoolyard wildlife habitat will also help attract more wildlife to the outdoor classroom site. Below are some tips that will make your maintenance easier.

Learning-Station-Adoption-Program

- ❑ **Create a “learning station maintenance folder”** for each outdoor learning station that includes the Maintenance Checklist for that learning station. *(Download the learning station maintenance checklists that your school needs from the OC Maintenance Tips section of AWF’s website.)*
- ❑ **Each August, ask each teacher/class to “adopt”** an outdoor learning station for one semester, and provide the learning station maintenance folder for the learning station that the teacher adopts.
- ❑ **Ask each teacher/class to complete** the weekly and seasonal tasks listed on the Maintenance Checklist for the learning station they adopted, and then record their maintenance task notes and observations for the next class that adopts that learning station.
- ❑ **Consider only allowing specific grade levels** to adopt specific learning stations based on the level of responsibility. For example, allow a kindergarten class to adopt and take care of the sensory garden, a first grade class to maintain the butterfly garden, a second grade class to keep the bird feeders filled, a third grade class to grow and harvest vegetables in the raised bed gardens, a fourth grade class to take care of the Eastern box turtles, and a fifth grade class to keep the pond clean and feed the fish.
- ❑ **Teachers can ask individual students** in their class to adopt a specific tree or plant in their learning station and to water and record observations for that specific plant during the “adoption period” for the learning station.



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Students can assist with weekly maintenance responsibilities such as picking up litter, cleaning the pond, and reporting any problems to the outdoor classroom planning committee member who is in charge of the maintenance plan.

Outdoor Classroom Maintenance

- ❑ **Each August, ask a planning committee member** to establish and coordinate the Outdoor Classroom (OC) Maintenance Plan for the upcoming year.
- ❑ **Create an Annual Maintenance Calendar** that addresses tasks for maintaining the overall outdoor classroom site such as gathering fallen leaves throughout the whole site in the fall, and then share the calendar with all school staff members, buildings and grounds staff, and parent and community volunteers. *(Utilize the example maintenance calendars on the OC Maintenance Tips webpage of the AWF website.)*
- ❑ **Develop a Weekly Tasks Checklist** that one or two students could be responsible for such as picking up litter or filling bird feeders.
- ❑ **Encourage student ownership** of the outdoor classroom by asking student clubs like the Beta Club, 4-H or Scouts to be responsible for specific maintenance tasks such as painting or staining your educational kiosks as a service-learning project.
- ❑ **Bring a Volunteer Sign-up Sheet** to your school’s Open House and other school events where parents and community members are present so that you can invite them to assist with maintenance tasks, and be sure to ask volunteers for their email addresses and phone numbers. *(Download an example Volunteer Sign-up Sheet in the Maintenance Tips section of the AWF website.)*
- ❑ **Set up an “email list” or “phone tree”** to contact volunteers regarding clean up days and special projects.
- ❑ **Discuss the maintenance tasks** with your school’s grounds staff to see if they are able to help with any of the maintenance tasks on your list such as mowing the grass, and explain that you do not want herbicides or pesticides sprayed in the outdoor classroom since it is habitat for local backyard wildlife.
- ❑ **Create a Summer Maintenance Schedule**, and have each volunteer (an individual or a family) sign up to take turns caring for the outdoor classroom for one week each during the summer so that summer maintenance is not one person’s responsibility.



Ask classes to “adopt” the different learning stations and gardens for one semester to help with the weekly and seasonal maintenance.

- ❑ Give your summer volunteers a list of specific tasks including watering plants, filling bird feeders, and pulling weeds.
- ❑ Keep your maintenance records with your other outdoor classroom records in a central location such as the media center, and make sure other planning committee members know where the records are kept so that they will not have to “reinvent the wheel” the following year.

Clean Up Day Tips

- ❑ At the beginning of each school year, set the dates for at least one Outdoor Classroom (OC) Clean Up Day per semester on a school day (Monday – Friday) so that all students will have the opportunity to help with maintenance of your outdoor classroom.
- ❑ When you schedule a clean up day, check to see what other activities such as field trips, festivals or sporting events are scheduled that could greatly impact the ability of people to volunteer.
- ❑ Schedule a “rain date” for the following day in case of inclement weather.
- ❑ Share the OC Clean Up Day dates with your school staff, parents and community volunteers as soon as the date(s) are set.
- ❑ Utilize the free OC Clean Up Day planning materials including the Clean Up Day Checklist and example Volunteer/Donor Form on AWF’s Website to help you plan your event.
- ❑ Create a list of the tasks you want to complete that day and prioritize them so that you get the most important ones done first.
- ❑ Do not try to do too much all at once—have defined tasks that can be completed in a given amount of time.
- ❑ Recruit reliable volunteers to be in charge of specific tasks so the day will run more smoothly and to keep you from running from task to task.

- ❑ Make sure you communicate exactly what tools you will provide and what the volunteers need to bring with them to help eliminate wasted time due to not having the right tools and materials on hand.
- ❑ When putting together a clean up schedule for a large project that requires a full day, have people sign-up for exact time slots to help you gauge how many volunteers you will have during each stage of the project.
- ❑ Be flexible and offer one-hour time slots for your volunteers.
- ❑ Schedule some outdoor classroom clean ups on Saturdays for parents and community volunteers who are unable to take time off during the work week.
- ❑ Try to keep weekend clean up days limited to the morning hours so that your volunteers do not have to give up a whole day of their weekend.
- ❑ Invite community groups such as local churches to assist with clean up days and special projects.

Make Weekend Work Days Fun!

- ❖ Use themes to make working in the outdoor classroom feel more like a festival than a chore.
- ❖ Provide cold drinks and tasty snacks.
- ❖ Provide a shady area for volunteers to rest.
- ❖ Hold contests to see who can pull the most weeds.
- ❖ Invite volunteers and students to paint designs on garden structures.
- ❖ Vary the activities for volunteers, so that people do not have to pull weeds every time they volunteer.
- ❖ Ask older students or volunteers to do craft projects or play games that relate to the outdoor classroom with younger children so little ones do not feel excluded and they are kept busy allowing parents to work.
- ❖ Rename common tasks to give them more meaning. For example, rather than focusing on “pulling weeds,” call it “collecting a ‘food harvest’ for the earthworms in your compost bin.”

