Alabama Outdoor Classroom
April Maintenance Checklist

During the month of April, you may want to use the following maintenance checklist to help keep your outdoor classroom in great shape and to prepare for future projects.

☐ Keep those pesky English sparrows/house sparrows and starlings from nesting in your bird houses. They will chase off the bluebirds and other species of native birds and even break the eggs or kill the young of other birds. If they start building in your bird houses, rip out their nesting material everyday (it is legal to destroy their nests, but it is illegal to destroy native bird nests). If you can’t keep them from nesting, take down your nests so that you are not letting the nonnative birds add to their numbers. Go to the following website for some other things such as a “sparrow spooker” and monofilament fish line on the box that you can do to help your bluebirds. http://www.sialis.org/hosp.htm

☐ Since this spring has been a little slower to warm up and still very wet in many locations, don’t panic about getting your garden planted. You still have plenty of time to plant your summer garden. The plants will just not have enough time to reach maturity before summer vacation arrives. Remember to think about a summer maintenance program this year that takes the later garden into account. This may mean, having to have a group of students met at the school once or twice a week to harvest the garden. This could be a good year to donate the produce from the school’s garden to a local food bank. For a list of what to plant in April, go to http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-0047/ANR-0047.pdf and print off a copy of the Alabama Gardener’s Calendar.

☐ Even though the leaves of daffodils and other spring blooming plants may look messy, don’t cut them off. You need to let them dye on their own as they are helping the bulb to build up stored energy so that they will bloom again next spring. If you cut off the leaves at this time, the plants will most likely not bloom and may not even survive until next spring. You can cut off the flower heads since this will help the plant send all of its energy into the bulb and not into trying to produce any seeds. If they are starting to get crowded, mark their locations so that you can dig them up in the fall and thin them.

☐ Hold off on mulching your garden as the soil temperature still needs to warm up a bit, especially since we have had such a cool spring. To take the soil temperature, you need to measure it at around 8 am at a depth of around 4 inches (use a soil thermometer if available). Hardy vegetables such as spinach, lettuce, parsnips and onions require soil temperatures of at least 35 F. Once temperatures warm up to 40 F, vegetables such as peas, radishes, celery, turnips, broccoli, beets and cauliflower become viable. Most warm-weather vegetables such as tomatoes, corn, peppers, eggplants and summer squash require 60 F soil temperatures.

Any questions, please contact Doyle Keasal, (334)750-6735 / keasade@auburn.edu or April Waltz, (256)882-9183 / aprilwaltz@alabamawildlife.org