

# It's for the Birds

## AFTER 3: Is your schoolyard for the Birds? Certify your schoolyard!

**After** your visit to establish a schoolyard habitat and receive certification from the National Wildlife Federation to designate your schoolyard as a place that is friendly to wildlife, including birds!

### Materials

<https://www.nwf.org/schoolyard/>

**Instructional Strategy-** There is a lot of variation for building a schoolyard habitat so the strategy will depend on student involvement, parent involvement, and community support. See the great overview from NWF for ideas on how to build a schoolyard habitat.

From the NWF website:

Since 1996, the National Wildlife Federation has worked to assist schools in the creation of Schoolyard Habitats®, which create and restore wildlife habitat on school grounds while



providing outdoor classrooms for learning across the curriculum. There are currently over 5,000 schools and counting that have been certified through this program. Schools can participate in the National Wildlife Federation's Schoolyard Habitats® program as follows:

### Two Ways to Design, Build, Certify, and Use Wildlife Habitats at School

#### Schoolyard Habitats

- Free National Wildlife Federation program
- Small team, teacher driven
- Results in Certified Wildlife Habitat
- Can Purchase Signage
- School can choose to become an Eco-School and reach higher recognition levels and awards



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## Eco-Schools USA

- Free National Wildlife Federation program
- Whole school, student-driven
- Results in Certified Wildlife Habitat and a Bronze Award
- Can Purchase Signage
- School addresses multiple "pathways" or themes
- School can achieve a Bronze, Silver, or Green Flag Award

To help reconnect today's children to the outdoors, the National Wildlife Federation assists schools in developing **outdoor classrooms called Schoolyard Habitats®**, where educators and students learn how to attract and support local wildlife.

The National Wildlife Federation's K-12, Nature Play, and Campus Ecology programs provide steps for creating habitat and outdoor classrooms at your place of learning, as well as showcasing how the habitat can be used for cross disciplinary learning.

Children in day care centers and preschools, nature centers, and thousands of students in grades K-12, along with parents, university students, teachers, administrators, community members, and volunteers have created unique habitat gardens and living learning laboratories nationwide.

These wildlife habitats become places where students not only learn about wildlife species and ecosystems, but also outdoor classrooms where they hone their academic skills and nurture their innate curiosity and creativity.

## How Schoolyard Habitats® Got Its Start

The National Wildlife Federation has encouraged individuals and communities to create and conserve wildlife habitat since 1973, when the Backyard Wildlife Habitat™ program (now called the Certified Wildlife Habitat® program) began.

In 1996, the Schoolyard Habitats® program was created to meet the growing interest and distinct needs of schools and school districts in creating and restoring wildlife habitat on school grounds. The program focuses specifically on assisting school communities in the use of school grounds as learning sites for wildlife conservation and cross-curricular learning.



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## Basic Steps to Creating a Schoolyard Habitat

### 1. Start a Habitat Team

The Habitat Team is composed of educators, students, parents, maintenance personnel, administrators, and community volunteers. Every member of the team brings their own skills. Some will focus on how to garden, others might figure out what parts of the curriculum can be served by the wildlife habitat, or what animal visitors to expect.

### 2. Choose a Site

Let's get students and other team members to study and map out the potential garden. Everyone can participate by either writing or drawing:

- **Physical elements** (soil, topography, water sources, drainage patterns, sun and wind exposure)
- **Ecological components** (plants and animals, including insects)
- **Human influences** (buildings, sidewalks, playing fields, utility right-of-ways and asphalt areas)
- **Boundaries** (including nearby habitats)

It's also fun to learn about the history of your site. How was the land used before your students arrived? Students might interview long-time community residents and conduct other research.

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When you choose your site, make sure it's great for wildlife and people. All wildlife requires food, water, cover, and places to reproduce and raise their young. Make it accessible for classes to use and for community members to visit.

### 3. Create a Work Plan

Careful planning will help your habitat project run smoothly. Elements like goals, task assignment, resource inventory, and tracking progress will divide and organize the workload into manageable steps.

### 4. Involve the Community

The creation of a schoolyard habitat is an excellent opportunity to reach out to the community members and invite their participation. To **build support for your project**, introduce your community to the contributions that the habitat site can make to enrich the school's educational offerings. The schoolyard habitat can be a benefit to the entire community as a public place for all to visit and enjoy.

You may **find assistance in your community** from a wide variety of sources:

- Landscape architects ready for a new challenge



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- Local businesses willing to donate plants, landscape materials, and expertise
- Garden and civic clubs excited to offer their knowledge and hands-on involvement

### 5. Certify Your Schoolyard Habitat

When you're ready, [complete our online application](#) and add your habitat to the thousands of backyards, parks, businesses, and other schools that provide habitat for wildlife through the National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat® program.

These are but a few suggestions for making the link between your project and the community—be creative and don't be afraid to ask! The material contributions, in-kind support, and resource connections will be invaluable to your project and will help strengthen school-community ties.

[Learn more about installing, using, and maintaining a schoolyard garden.](#)

