



Nature Explore Outdoor Classrooms Support Whole Child Development



Beginning in infant and toddler programs and preschools, through elementary schools, Nature Explore Classrooms are supporting children's learning and social/emotional development in all domains. Designed to meet children's individual learning styles, interests, and strengths, Nature Explore Classrooms help children grow into their best

selves. Here educators are able to observe and support children from a place of personal understanding.

In these intentionally designed, nature-rich spaces, children improve math and science learning, cultivate art and music interests, and foster initiative, cooperation, and creativity.

Nature Explore Classrooms can be built

anywhere a traditional playground might be considered—with life-transforming benefits for children. As these outdoor classrooms become more commonplace throughout America, educators and parents will cultivate the broad expectation that education and life experiences should support the full range of children's intelligences and strengths.

An **Entry Feature** gives children a visual clue that they are entering a special place.

A **Music and Movement Area** provides children with a chance to create their own music and enjoy expressive movement.

An **Open Area** gives children room for running, rolling, and other large motor play.

A **Gathering Area** serves as a space to meet with a group of children for more structured programming, or as they enter and exit the outdoor space.

A **Garden and/or Pathway through Plantings** area lets children experience planting and harvesting, and the wonders of nature through the seasons. The area may include a **Pollinator Garden**.



A **Nature Art Area** supports children's creativity as they sketch and build 3-dimensional works of art made of pine cones, acorns, sea shells, and other natural materials.

A **Climbing and Crawling Area** gives growing children the chance to safely master physical challenges.

A **Messy Materials Area** supports cooperative problem-solving and personal mastery as children build with nature's loose parts such as stumps, gourds, and tree slices.

Storage in each area allows children ready access to outdoor classroom components and tools.

A **Building Area** complete with organic and geometric building blocks provides space for individual creativity while children strengthen mathematical and visual-spatial thinking.

Nature Explore Classrooms can be designed in countless possible configurations for large or small spaces. Each outdoor classroom reflects the interests of the program's families and staff, and uses regional plants and materials. This is one example of how the 10 recommended areas can work in a fairly small space.