



Before you begin the development of your outdoor classroom, take the time to **collect information** about how to develop an outdoor classroom site through the Alabama Outdoor Classroom (AOC) Program. Then share this information with your faculty and staff so that everyone understands the benefits of using an outdoor classroom as an educational tool and the commitment required to sustain the outdoor classroom from year to year. This will increase the ownership and participation of the faculty throughout the life of your outdoor classroom. Below are some suggestions on how to get started.



Trained Outdoor Classroom Consultants provide free on-site consultations for schools interested in developing an outdoor classroom for hands-on learning opportunities.

- ❑ **Contact the Alabama Outdoor Classroom Program** at [oc@alabamawildlife.org](mailto:oc@alabamawildlife.org) to help guide you through the development of your outdoor classroom.
- ❑ **Attend an Outdoor Classroom Workshop** to learn how to develop an effective, sustainable outdoor classroom site through the AOC program. *Visit the Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF) website for Educator Workshop dates and locations.*
- ❑ **Sign up for the AWF's Outdoor Classroom eNewsletter** to receive updates about grant opportunities, activity ideas, and maintenance tips by clicking on the "envelope" icon in the top right corner of any AWF webpage. *(Be sure to choose "AWF Outdoor Classroom eNewsletter".)*
- ❑ **Visit other enrolled Outdoor Classroom schools** that have already developed an outdoor classroom area to get advice and ideas from their teachers. Each outdoor classroom will reflect the personality of the school and yours will be unique, but learning from the experience of other schools will help you get started on the right foot. *For OC schools' contact info, click on your county in our Alabama Outdoor Classroom Schools Map on AWF's website.*
- ❑ **Create an Outdoor Classroom Resource Area** in a central location such as your library where you can store a filing cabinet or bookshelf to keep track of all of your photographs, meeting notes, maps, maintenance plans,

## Free Online Outdoor Classroom Resources

### Alabama Wildlife Federation Website

- ❖ Alabama Outdoor Classroom Program Overview
- ❖ Educator Workshops Dates & Locations
- ❖ OC Planning Guide & Checklists
- ❖ Schoolyard Wildlife Habitat Tips
- ❖ Outdoor Learning Station Ideas & Project Plans
- ❖ OC Activities & Lesson Plans
- ❖ OC Grants, Funding & Support
- ❖ OC Work Day Planning Material
- ❖ OC Maintenance Tips
- ❖ Alabama Outdoor Classroom Schools Map
- ❖ Alabama Outdoor Classroom E-newsletter

### Alabama Outdoor Classroom on Pinterest

- ❖ Hands-on Outdoor Activity Ideas
- ❖ Outdoor Classroom Learning Stations
- ❖ Outdoor Science, Sensory & Music Stations
- ❖ Butterfly & Pollinator Habitat
- ❖ School Garden Ideas
- ❖ Weather Stations
- ❖ Outdoor Art Projects
- ❖ Outdoor Educational Signs
- ❖ Outdoor Classroom Seating
- ❖ Nature Paths
- ❖ And more...

budgets, receipts, activity guides, and resource material. Keeping records of what you are doing now will greatly assist others who come after you.

- ❑ **Go online** to gather ideas from websites and Pinterest about how schools utilize outdoor classrooms and schoolyard wildlife habitats as outdoor learning stations and education tools.

Once you have collected the appropriate information, it is now time to **share the information with key people** to garner as much support for the outdoor classroom as you can. Again, you should discuss your ideas with everyone at the beginning of the project before you break ground to gauge the interest and feasibility of the project and to make sure that everyone feels included. Below are some key people who you should contact along with some potential items that you might want to discuss with them.



The school's principal can be one of the greatest supporters for the outdoor classroom project by attending planning committee meetings, writing grant proposals for specific learning stations, identifying local businesses that could provide support, and promoting the use of the outdoor classroom as an educational tool.

## Administrators

- ❑ **Discuss the AOC program resources** and your project ideas with the principal including:
  - ❖ What concerns does the principal have, if any? If there are any liability or vandalism issues, share the "Tips to Reduce Vandalism" on page 22 and in the Maintenance Tips section of AWF's website.
  - ❖ How will teachers handle bee stings, mosquito bites or poison ivy? Make sure all teachers understand to take the same steps as they would on the playground if a child gets a bee sting or mosquito bite. If a child comes in contact with poison ivy, send her/him to the nurse's station to wash the area with an urushiol oil remover like Tecnu.
  - ❖ Which, if any, of the building codes apply to the outdoor classroom? For example, does the school system have any special regulations regarding the depth of aquatic habitats such as fish ponds?
  - ❖ How will the outdoor classroom be used as an educational tool by the faculty? Share the article entitled "The Outdoor Classroom Philosophy: Providing Hands-on Minds-on Conservation Education Opportunities" from pages 4-8 in this planning guide.
  - ❖ How will the outdoor classroom area be maintained? What are the current maintenance practices? Discuss the OC Maintenance Tips, including the Adopt-a-Learning-Station program, found on page 34 and in the Maintenance Tips section of AWF's website.
  - ❖ Where are some potential sites on the campus for the

- outdoor classroom area(s)? You should choose a site that is easily and quickly accessible to all teachers.
  - ❖ What areas on the campus (if any) should be avoided for outdoor classroom use? Are there any future construction plans for the current campus including new buildings, playgrounds, sports fields, parking lots, or portables?
  - ❖ Are there any sources of money available for the outdoor classroom development and/or for outdoor activity materials?

- ❑ **Get administrative approval** from the principal.
- ❑ **Discuss the project** with the school system administrators such as the Superintendent of Education if needed.

## School Faculty & Staff

- ❑ **Send an email** to [oc@alabamawildlife.org](mailto:oc@alabamawildlife.org) to request a faculty presentation from your local Outdoor Classroom Consultant to learn about the different types of outdoor learning stations you could include in your outdoor classroom site and the types of support and resources provided through the AOC Program.
- ❑ **Present the information** that you learned at the Outdoor Classroom Workshop along with the tips and learning station ideas from the local Outdoor Classroom schools you visited at a faculty meeting.
- ❑ **Contact your local Outdoor Classroom Consultant** to set up a free online faculty survey to gauge their interest





Get to know the folks at your local Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) office if you do not already know them. ACES has an office in every county of Alabama, and their knowledgeable agents can help you with native plant suggestions, vegetable garden tips, nature-based activities, and more.

in developing an outdoor classroom for hands-on learning opportunities, to determine any concerns they may have, and to find out which faculty members would like to serve on the outdoor classroom planning committee.

## Students

- Discuss the purpose** of the outdoor classroom and schoolyard wildlife habitat with your students.
- Include your students** as much as possible in the design of the outdoor classroom, in the construction phases, and with maintenance and clean-ups to help foster feelings of ownership and prevent vandalism and littering.

## School Buildings and Maintenance Department

- Discuss your outdoor classroom project ideas** with your school's custodians and/or grounds keepers to get their feedback.
- Ask about any maintenance issues** or other concerns in the proposed outdoor classroom site(s) that will require assistance from the maintenance department or impact their current maintenance and mowing practices.

## Parents

- Give an Outdoor Classroom presentation** to your PTA/PTO including learning station ideas from your visits with other OC schools to explain how outdoor classrooms can be used as an educational tool and what your plans are for your school's outdoor classroom. You can also use slides from the "Intro to the Alabama Outdoor Classroom Program" powerpoint on AWF's website.

- Provide updates** about your school's outdoor classroom development plans on your school's website and/or Facebook page.
- Ask the PTA/PTO** to include an allocation for the outdoor classroom in their budget each year for activity materials and outdoor classroom maintenance.

## Local Community

- Contact your local representatives** from your board of education, city council and county commission to inform them of your outdoor classroom plans as they may be able to provide support with construction or maintenance projects.
- Contact your county's Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) office** to ask how they can assist with the outdoor classroom projects and how they can provide nature-based activities and curriculum. They may also be able to help you contact local Master Gardeners who would be able to assist your school.
- Contact your local school clubs** (Beta Club, Science Club, Junior Master Gardeners, Future Farmers of America, 4-H Club, Junior Naturalists, etc) to see how they would like to get involved.
- Contact local community organizations and churches** to see how they can assist. *See the Community Support & Resources List in the OC Grants, Funding & Support section of AWF's website.*