



Increasing the Biodiversity of Your Schoolyard

Your schoolyard may be largely asphalt and concrete but life occurs everywhere if you give it a chance. All living things need food, water, and shelter. If you provide these, living things will come.

Recognize what you already have. Look in the pile of leaves that have blown into a corner of your schoolyard, look in a crack in the concrete. These are places that provide living things with what they need.

Bring in new soil. If you have no soil on your schoolyard, build raised beds and fill them with compost and soil. If you do have soil in your schoolyard that is hard packed and lifeless, add compost and soil and instruct children to stay off it. The compost and soil provide food, water, and shelter for worms, isopods, ants, fungi, and plants. Once those things move in, living things that depend on them for food, water and shelter will move in, creating a complex web of living things living in your schoolyard.

Leave some areas undisturbed. It is important for students to see that living things carry on, even in the city, without human assistance.

Encourage decomposition. To keep a web of life flourishing, you need to allow for decomposition. Let the fall leaves remain on the soil over the winter. This gives the worms and other decomposers something to eat, which in turn provides food for everything else. Let the custodian and principal know you want the leaves to remain. Add extra leaves, newspaper, or straw as a winter cover for the raised beds. When plants die for the winter, dig them into the ground or put them into a compost bin or pile, to incorporate into the raised bed.



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Provide shelter. Bring in an old log; some rocks, or paving stones and place them on top of soil. Along with the leaves, these objects provide living things a moist, safe place away from the burning sun and hungry predators. At the simplest level, create mini shelters using paper clips to hold one or two leaves on a branch in a curled position, or leave out rolled paper.

Create a vegetable, herb, or flower garden. Plant a garden in the raised beds or improved ground soil. Consider carefully, especially with a vegetable garden, the timing of the school year. Unless you have a summer program that is actively involved, select plants that bloom, or mature in spring and fall.

Teach students to protect these areas. It is important to teach students that soil and everything on it is a home and should be respected. If they lift up a rock to look at what's under it, they should put it back where they found it. If they don't, all the living things they've disturbed will find another, safer place to live.

Be patient. A schoolyard habitat can take a couple of years to get established. But even areas completely surrounded by blacktop can become filled with living things if food, shelter and water are provided.