

Delaware Bay Estuary Project

*Partnering to
connect people
with nature*



Why we make connecting people with nature a priority

Many families have very little personal connection to the outside world. Regular experience of nature can restore that connection and fosters the understanding that is critical for the future of environmental conservation. DBEP works to connect people with nature through a variety of partners, including schools and the Delaware Children in Nature and the Delaware Association for Environmental Education (DAEEonline.org). Nature-based curriculum in schools can improve attendance, physical and mental health, standardized test scores, GPAs, and general attitudes about conservation and stewardship.

Schoolyard habitat

DBEP can help schools jumpstart their integration of nature into classes by partnering to create schoolyard habitat, a kind of “living classroom” that provides an interactive environment for students of all ages and potentially the community to experience and learn about nature.

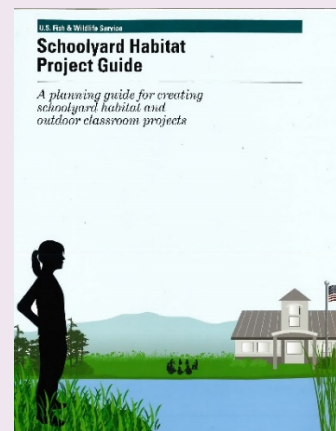
Creating schoolyard habitat often includes physically altering the landscape to make it more suitable for providing food and cover to wildlife. Sometimes this entails changing the grade and hydrology and almost always involves changing the plant community. Native plants provide special value because they best suit the needs of local wildlife. Habitats at schools are typically only a few acres or even fractions of an acre. Each school’s situation is unique but wildlife, such as pollinating insects, amphibians, and foraging migratory birds, often benefit.

DBEP encourages schoolyard habitat projects to be ecologically sound, sustainable, accessible, integrated into curricula, and planned with long-term stewardship in mind. Having schoolyard habitat at a school means the school and students become stewards of that habitat. The habitats are designed to be more self-sustaining than typical gardens but they still need work such as management of unwanted “invasive” plants.

Creating and maintaining schoolyard habitat starts with having a good team, including students, teachers, maintenance staff, administrators, community members, and partners. Schoolyard habitats are only as good as the extent they are used and taken advantage of by the school and community.

Resources

Many resources exist for providing ideas for how to develop and use schoolyard habitat and associated lesson plans for self-guided or teacher led learning. For example, the USFWS has developed a guide for turning school grounds into habitat through steps such as team building, planning, creating, maintaining, and incorporating the habitat into the school’s culture. The guide can be found at: <https://www.fws.gov/external-affairs/marketing-communications/printing-and-publishing/publications/3012-Schoolyard-Habitat-Guide.pdf>



“Students going outside frequently to learn, discover, create, and celebrate is the ultimate goal of every schoolyard habitat”

How can DBEP help you?

DBEP can help you with your projects based on your needs. We can be a long-term or short-term partner. We can provide materials (e.g., plants, lumber) and on-the-ground or technical assistance to support sustainable projects that both help schools or urban youth get more connected with nature and provide direct benefits to wildlife.



The Delaware Bay Estuary Project is part of the Coastal Program, a habitat conservation program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that focuses on conserving the ecological integrity of beaches, bays, estuaries, and coastal watersheds. We work through voluntary partnerships with a variety of public and private entities, such as private landowners, land trusts, municipalities, states, and other federal agencies, to enhance, restore, conserve, study, and monitor habitat for key federal trust wildlife resources in the Delaware River and Delmarva Peninsula ecosystems.



Youth in urban areas often have the most need for improved connection with nature. DBEP can be in partnerships that engage diverse urban youth with nature. Although space is limited in urban environments, created habitat can expose numerous people to nature while providing opportunities to wildlife that otherwise would not exist.



Connecting youth with nature may involve science but just as easily can involve the arts and other disciplines.



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