



Sustainable Schoolyards

What is a Sustainable Schoolyard?

NEBRASKA STATEWIDE ARBORETUM

One that can be maintained with limited inputs, includes a diverse group of plants and is designed to make positive impact on the environment while providing a visually pleasing and educational atmosphere.

Sustainable: able to be maintained at a certain rate or level.

Sustainable Landscape: A garden space that was designed and planted with the goal of having a positive effect on the environment.

SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPE

- Limits lawn to high-traffic areas and those used for activities
- Plants are spaced close together and utilized as “living mulch”
- Uses native or regionally adapted plants
- Uses a diverse group of plants that create a community and provide habitat
- Helps manage stormwater by preventing erosion and allowing water to be filtered and absorbed into the ground

VS

TRADITIONAL LANDSCAPE

- Large areas of lawn that require large amounts of water, fertilizer and time
- Wide plant spacing that requires long term mulching and chemical weed control to maintain
- High water-use plants in large groups
- Poorly adapted, non-native plants that require excess care
- Designed aesthetically without specific goals for habitat or water usage

Benefits of a Sustainable Schoolyard:

1. Is easily used as a learning or teaching tool
2. Supports education, exploration and recreation
3. Provides many opportunities to connect with nature
4. Is visually attractive and meets the goals for the school grounds
5. It is manageable within school budgets and staff capabilities



Native plants were planted close together in Union Plaza to create a low water-use garden that requires very little weeding and maintenance.

The Impact of Sustainable Landscapes on Students

Schools can play an important role in forming students opinions of the environment and connecting them with hands on experiences. Many schools have programs in place to teach students about recycling, limiting trash and using less electricity. These lessons are important, but if they all happen indoors the students miss the opportunity to connect with the environment they are learning to protect. Providing students with a landscape where they can interact with nature and observe sustainable landscaping practices is an important foundation for educating students who, not only know how to be good stewards of the environment, but are motivated to do so.

Helping plant and care for a tree that improves their schoolyard is a valuable experience for students of any age.



The Impact of Sustainable Landscapes on the Community

In many places, schools are one of the largest landowners. How they care for this land has an impact on both the community and the ecosystem around it. Students and teachers spend the most time in a schoolyard but everyone in the community is influenced by it. Parents visit to drop off and pick up children and may use the playground during the summer while community members visit for school programs and sporting events. The landscaping practices used in the schoolyard can become an example not only for students but for the whole community. An attractive and welcoming schoolyard invites everyone to enjoy the space in a positive way.