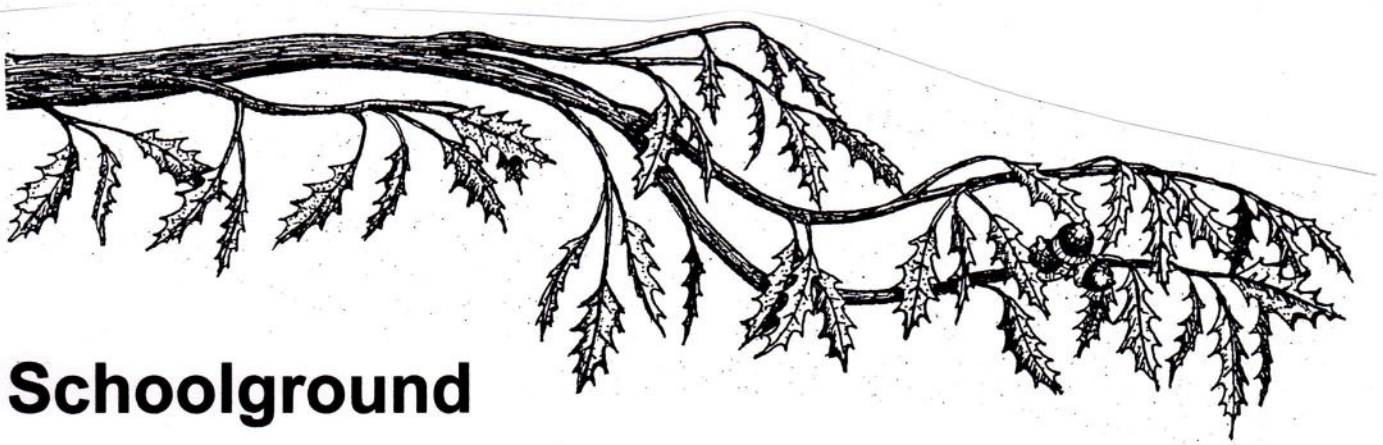


Schoolground naturalization

Most Prince Edward Island schools are situated on old fields - large brick buildings in the midst of grassland. At many schools, teachers and students have recognized that planting trees would help to make the school yards more interesting and attractive. A few schools have done outstanding work in improving their surroundings. The Macphail Woods Ecological Forestry Project is trying to encourage others to recognize the many benefits that plantings can bring to a school. Every year we help students plant trees and shrubs at schools and we hope to assist even more schools in the future with not only schoolyard plantings but also woodlot management and Acadian forest restoration.

Why should you do school plantings at all? School yard plantings should be considered an extension of the classroom, becoming the focal spot for teaching a variety of subjects. They become excellent places to explore:

Natural succession - an important cornerstone of the natural world. Plantings teach you that things change as you alter soil conditions, amount of available sunlight, seed sources, etc.

Wildlife identification - you will want to know what you are planting and what species you hope to attract.

Habitat restoration - planting rare native trees and shrubs can have far-reaching impacts, since birds, small mammals or the wind can transport seeds to nearby woodlands.

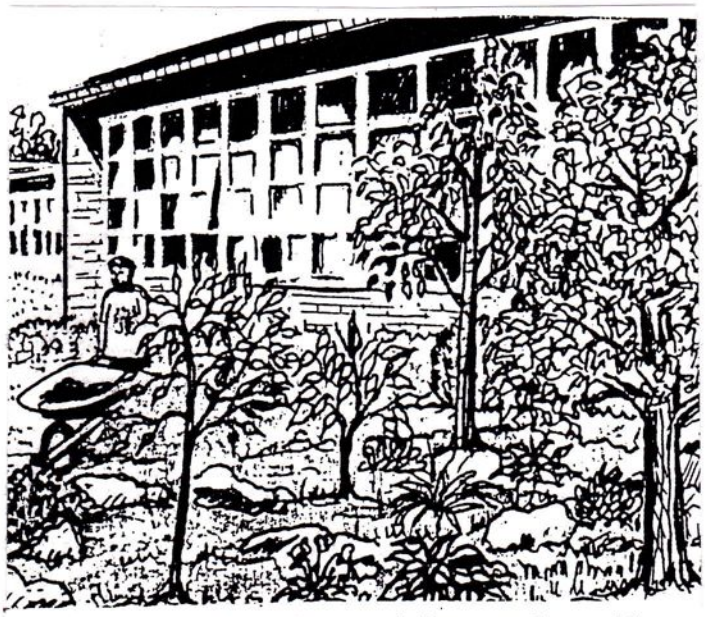
Bird migration - why are some birds here only in the

warm weather and where do they go for the rest of the year? Are there any threats to those birds on the wintering and breeding grounds?

Soil science - how plants get nutrients, what makes up good soil and what kinds of things live there and what roles do they serve?

Gardening - looking at pollination and pollinators, seeds and methods of propagation.

The many uses of plants - native species have medicinal uses and were valued by indigenous peoples. As well, plants are used for building boats, furniture and houses and provide important sources of food.



Plantings can save schools money, through lower maintenance costs and reduction in pesticide use. Lawns must be mowed regularly and are often fertilized or sprayed with "weed" killers. Once established, native plantings need only periodic pruning and mulching that the students themselves can take on.

Why use native plants?

Native plants are usually very reliable - they have adapted to the climatic conditions of the area and serve a variety of functions within the ecosystem. More important they are proven performers - hardy, fitting into a wide variety of habitats, valuable to wildlife, useful for stabilizing streambanks and/or controlling soil erosion. Instead of looking for exotic species, many of which cause serious disturbances in our areas or need winter protection, look at the beauty of native plants all year long. Many native species have colourful twigs, buds and fruit, showy flowers and an exotic structure.

Steps to success

1. get students involved early and give them some control over the work. A good method is to offer a list of suitable plants for the site with information on how they grow and what types of wildlife they attract. The students then do the planning, design and planting.
2. be flexible when planning - it is better to put in a dozen plants than none and you can always expand later. On the other hand, don't be afraid of the energy that may be out there. Larger plantings are exciting and give a sense of accomplishment when they are done. Just make sure you can look after the plantings.
3. if you don't have the expertise, find someone in the community who will help - call up someone in a local environmental or natural history group, a university or college biology club, garden club, a local landscaper or contractor, etc.
4. plant only good quality plants grown in the area and remember that it is the rootstock that is important, not the height of the plant.
5. make sure the students are interested - if you can't inspire them, call in someone who can or visit a woodlot with someone who loves trees and wildlife. Try taking your class out for a nature walk or having someone come into the school with a presentation about wildlife and native plants.
6. promote the plantings within the school - wild areas are not a threat, since you are using them to promote good values and students will take pride and ownership in the plantings. The plantings also can save the maintenance people a lot of needless mowing, often in steep unused areas.
7. make it fun - the students must do the plantings but make it an entertaining event. You can save the earth and enjoy yourself at the same time. Avoid large plantings unless you have lots of bodies to do the work and supervise the planters - a long day of planting can make anyone cranky.
8. plan to maintain the plantings. A heavy mulch of wood chips goes a long way towards lessening future problems with weeding and the need for watering. Designate someone to look after the plantings over the summer, if only to keep an eye on things.

What else can you do?

- initiate a rare species rescue program, trying to bring back some native species that have been eradicated from your area
- start a small nursery at the school
- do a community planting
- adopt a nearby pond, stream or forest
- volunteer with groups working in your area of interest
- start a composting project for fertilizing future plantings or just to give away
- set up and maintain bird feeders and bird waterers
- build and set up nest boxes