

BUILDING YOUR OUTDOOR CLASSROOM: THE TOP 10

A Summary Guide



Please see [The Top 10: An Extended Picture Guide](#), linked in the Table of Contents, for further details.

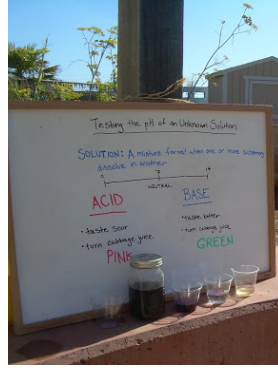
WHAT IS THE "TOP 10"?

The Top 10 is a list of ten infrastructure items that we believe every outdoor classroom should have. This picture guide begins with general pictures of outdoor classrooms across several different school sites. We then work through each item in the Top 10, providing several different examples of each in order to demonstrate the range that exists in outdoor classrooms. Use this picture guide as inspiration when developing your own outdoor classroom. If you'd like to reference an extended version of this document throughout your planning, you can find one in the Table of Contents.

Seating Circle



Whiteboard /Chalkboard



Teaching Table



Storage



Food Garden Area



Exploration Area



Garden Agreements



Stations



Signs








Additional Enhancements



#1: SEATING CIRCLE

A place for students to gather, especially for class openings and closings.

Options <i>(listed in order of ease to implement and, generally, cost)</i>	Considerations
On The Ground	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Inexpensive- Can paint sit spots on asphalt or use vinyl spot markers (P.E. teachers at school often have these!)
Stumps	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Can be obtained for free from tree removal services- Can use stumps as a tool to teach about tree rings or paint the tops- Should be dug into the ground for stability; can be wobbly on top of asphalt/concrete
Wooden Benches	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Should be built with redwood or another wood that will last outdoors- Use a sealant or paint to increase longevity- Moveable benches can be useful for small group work throughout the garden
Cob Benches	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Can be a good community build project & example of using natural materials- Requires upkeep and can fall apart, especially if unprotected from rain
Concrete/Stone Benches	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Expensive- Generally requires work from a licensed contractor

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ADDITIONAL THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN MAKING A SEATING CIRCLE



How many students are in a typical class?

- Sit spots are helpful for spacing out students on wood or concrete benches. They are also a great classroom management tool. In the photo below, the instructor can group students by bench color (yellow, red, blue, purple), sit spot animal (butterfly, ladybug, dragonfly), or sit spot color (yellow, red) to form groups of different sizes.

How should seats be oriented in order to avoid having students look into the sun?

- Students have an easier time focusing if they're not looking into the sun, so it's worthwhile to be intentional about the orientation of your seating circle. Note, however, that if students are facing away from the sun the instructor will be looking into the sun!

How close will students be sitting to the ground?

- Benches should be built at a height appropriate for students (~14-16" for elementary school). Students will likely be tempted to play with wood chips, decomposed granite, leaves, and other natural materials under foot. It's helpful to set seating circle expectations early in the year (i.e. "quiet feet in circle").

#2: WHITEBOARD/CHALKBOARD

Used to write agendas & instructions or to display visuals.

Options

(listed in order of ease to implement and, generally, cost)

Considerations

Whiteboard /
Chalkboard Easel



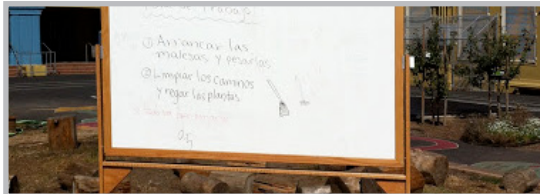
- Affordable and come in a variety of sizes
- Can topple easily in the wind
- Whiteboards can be easier to write on and clean off, but chalk boards do not create as much glare for students on sunny days

Free-Standing
Whiteboard



- Affordable and come in a variety of sizes
- Small boards can be useful for writing instructions for small group activities taking place at different locations throughout the garden, or for posting guiding questions for students throughout the garden

Large Whiteboard
on Wheels



- Extra space for writing/hanging visuals
- Can be expensive
- Should be attached to a wall or weighted down, as these boards can fall over in heavy winds and become a safety hazard

Mounted Whiteboard



- Whiteboards/chalkboards can be attached to walls outside, though the method depends on the surface
- Easier to use regularly because the board doesn't need to be transported in/out of storage
- Boards have a shorter lifespan if not protected from the elements

Protected Whiteboards



- Expensive
- Easier to use regularly because the board doesn't need to be transported in/out of storage
- Last longer than unprotected outdoor whiteboards

#3: TEACHING TABLE

A multi-purpose surface for lesson supplies & teacher materials

Options

(listed in order of ease to implement and, generally, cost)

Considerations

Folding Table



- Inexpensive
- Should be stored inside, protected from the elements

Wood Table



- Can be built or purchased
- Can be left outside in a permanent location; use wood sealant to protect from the elements

ADDITIONAL THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN MAKING A TEACHING TABLE

What is the primary use of the table?

Teaching tables can be great for setting up materials that students will access during lessons (i.e. worksheets, pencils, etc.). However, they often double as a space for teacher materials (i.e. chime/attention-getter, equity sticks, lesson plan). It can be helpful to differentiate these spaces. For instance, a bottom shelf can be used for student materials and a top shelf can be limited to teacher access only. Alternatively, if you have the space, you can designate one table as a teaching table and a separate table for student materials.



Sharpened Pencils

Broken Pencils

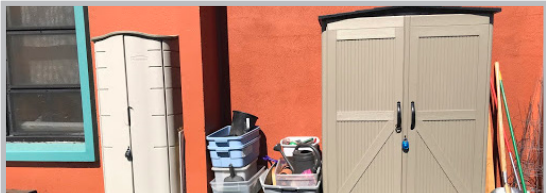
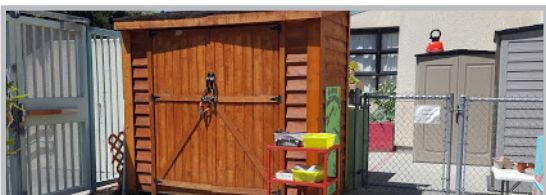
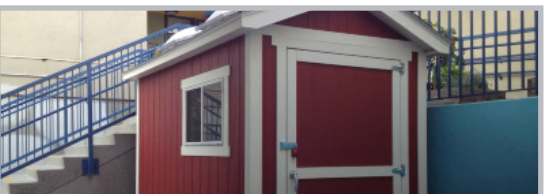
Keep Kleenex, band-aids, or other commonly requested items handy

Turn-In Tray

Take Tray

#4: STORAGE

For garden supplies, lesson supplies, and more!

Options <i>(listed in order of ease to implement and, generally, cost)</i>	Considerations	
Plastic Shed		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Affordable & come in a variety of sizes- Usually easy to assemble- Plastic can warp or break over time; shorter lifespan- Can add a lock but generally least secure option
Wood Shed Kit		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Come in a variety of sizes- Assembly varies in terms of difficulty- More aesthetically pleasing than plastic sheds- Can add a lock; more secure than plastic sheds
Tuff Shed		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Expensive- Customizable & very secure- High quality, last a long time- Price includes assembly on site

ADDITIONAL THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN BUYING A SHED








Who will have access to the materials in the shed?

If you have space and funding, consider purchasing two sheds-- a large one to store teaching materials and larger garden tools that young students shouldn't directly access, and a smaller one for materials that young students can always access. The shed shown below is always open to students, and contains gloves, trowels, mud kitchen supplies, plastic bugs, and more.

Alice Fong Yu Alternative School, SF

#5: FOOD GARDENS

A designated growing area for students to interact with growing food and annual plant life cycles

Options <i>(listed in order of ease to implement and, generally, cost)</i>		Considerations
In Ground- Without Borders		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Inexpensive- If using native soil, make sure to have a soil test done first- Are likely to get stepped in and will spill over into pathways over time- Can make doing irrigation easier/less expensive
In Ground- With Borders		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Inexpensive- Borders can be created with a variety of found or bought materials
Raised Beds- Re-purposed		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Can be easier/less expensive than building beds- Keeps plants protected from being stepped on and underground pests- More control over soil quality- Need to be aware of the quality of material and any potential contaminants
Raised Beds- Built		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- More expensive, but often longer lasting- A great opportunity to build community while constructing- Use wood that will last (redwood or cedar) from a trusted source
Containers		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Great for small spaces, or extending the garden into unlikely places!- Can be easily moved for different spacial or plant needs

#6: EXPLORATION AREA

Exploration areas are green spaces not focused on food production. They are aesthetically enticing places for students to explore and interact with nature!

Options

(listed in order of ease to implement and, generally, cost)

Considerations

“Forest Area”



- Even small spaces can feel like a forest to a child! Consider utilizing plants of various heights, habits, or seasonal changes to make it enticing for many ages throughout the year
- Training or pruning your plants to create “hiding spots” will draw students in and foster a connection to the space through fun and security

Pathways



- Using mulch or another distinguishable material for your pathways will help direct students towards the appropriate exploration areas and away from places they shouldn't disturb
- Adding stepping stones, arrows, or tree stumps adds an extra element of fun and directs student exploration. They can also be moved regularly to change up the flow of the space





Interactive Elements



- For small spaces with limited space for planting perennials, think about ways you can utilize multiple dimensions through interactive activities built into your design

#7: GARDEN AGREEMENTS

These norms are established between students and instructor at the beginning of the year, and help ensure positive classroom culture

<p>Options <i>(listed in order of ease to implement and, generally, cost)</i></p>	<p>Considerations</p>
<p>Laminated</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cheap and easy, you can even use sheet protectors if a laminator is not available - Best for short term signage that can be taken down and stored when not in use to avoid weather damage
<p>Painted</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long lasting and relatively inexpensive, see slide 70 for tips on making your own - Can mirror school wide agreements or be unique to the garden, but should be straightforward and easy to remember or recite
<p>Multilingual</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helps foster an inclusive classroom if all students are able to read and understand the outdoor classroom agreements
<p>Unique!</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreements can be posted throughout the classroom or in one central location for everyone to refer to - Involve students in the creation or painting of garden agreements to increase investment in following them

#8: GARDEN STATIONS

Garden Stations are activities that students learn early in the year, and are able to engage in autonomously with practice. They can be “open” or “closed” during recess or other free time, as decided by the instructor. They can also be used for “early finisher” activities during class time. For an explanation of each station, please see the full picture guide.

1. Watering Stations*

2. Dig Zone*

3. Worm Bin*

4. Bug Hunt

5. Seed Sorting

6. Habitat Building/
Fairy Houses

7. Mud Kitchen

8. Color Hunt

9. Litter Patrol/
Sweeping



Glen Park Elementary, SF

*We recommend starting with the first three stations and adding more as the outdoor classroom becomes more established.

#9: SIGNS

Make the outdoor classroom more inviting, interactive, and informative.

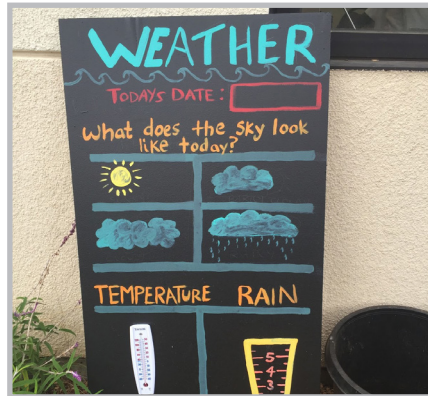
Welcome to the
Outdoor Classroom



Height Charts



Weather



Diagrams



Direction Posts



Plant ID Signs



#10: ADDITIONAL ENHANCEMENTS

Anything else to make your space unique and fit your students' needs.

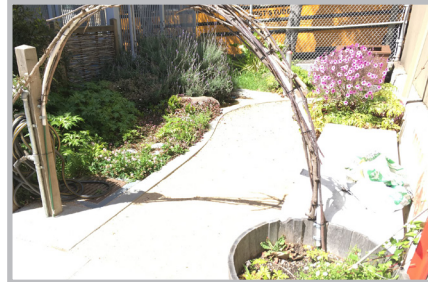
Peace Corner /
Peace Path



Shade Structure



Tunnel



Murals



Sink



Gratitude Walls



Compost Bin



Observation Stations

